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Trafficked Women as Empowered Agents?

Exploring the experiences of trafficked women from Sonagacchi, Kolkata.

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Abstract

This thesis explores the freedom experiences of trafficked women from Sonagacchi, Kolkata, and argues that freedom for women trafficked into the sex trade is more complex than simply equating freedom to empowerment or exit from the sex trade. The trafficking of human beings is a major development issue, highlighted in the recently developed Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), which sets a target within SDG five, eight and sixteen to eradicate trafficking in all forms by 2030. To be able to reach this goal, a broad understanding of trafficking is needed. Research in the field of human trafficking is relatively recent with the majority of studies focusing on rescue and rehabilitation as the only means of exit from a trafficking situation.

This thesis adds to the body of research on trafficking, by exploring the exit strategies of women who successfully exited a trafficking experience and seeking to understand the processes in women's empowerment and agency. Field work took place in Sonagacchi, Kolkata the largest red-light area in India over a six-week period. A narrative inquiry method was used to hear the life stories of five women who have successfully exited their trafficking situation as well as interviews with four social workers.

The findings of this study identified strategies that facilitated trafficked women's exit from the sex trade. In addition, the processes of empowerment and agency that women experienced were explored, highlighting that individuals can experience empowerment processes and some degrees of agency even in exploitative environments. The idea that exit from the sex trade and empowerment equate to freedom is challenged within this study. It is recognised that freedom is contextual, personal and cultural in nature, and that in the context of the West Bengal sex trade, experiences of freedom encompassed contentment and well-being. The main implication of the findings of this research is that trafficked women experience empowerment and agency in the midst of their trafficking experience, but that experiences of freedom are more complex than the literature suggests, and women require healing and wholeness in order for freedom to be actualised.

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Chapter 1:

Introduction

1.1 Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the many women of Sonagacchi whose lives have inspired me beyond measure and have shown me what it means to be strong and courageous. I would like to open the thesis with lyrics to a song written by Kyle Scott and inspired by the women of Sonagacchi.

Blind

By Kyle Scott

Some days these eyes
Would rather I leave them closed than carry me
Carry me though what you know dear sister
Carry on through what you feel

Most days these eyes
Are never the least composed of strength and
Courage to behold and fear if
Ever they were my own I'd fail to stand and look beyond this day you know I go

I go walking blind for most my life
I go walking blind and then she smiles
I go walking blind for most my life
And then she smiles

Oh that smile
By it I do proceed to hope
Yes your will to live taught me to walk on
Never a moment far too gone

You see those lies
Are soon to be no more yes every
Every lie those lanes have told you
Now here I stand and watch you walk so tall
No man need ever break your fall you know I go

I go walking blind for most my life
I go walking blind and then she smiles
I go walking blind for most my life
And then she smiles

The lyrics of this song echo my own feelings of being amazed by the strength and courage of women who have been trafficked into the sex trade to live beyond the circumstances of their trafficking experience. I particularly resonate with the line: “Oh that smile, by it I do proceed to hope, yes your will taught me to go on, never a moment far too gone.” These women have taught me never to let go of hope, and that even in the most exploitative environments there exists possibility to change. I feel privileged to be a witness to their experiences and watch them stand tall proud of who they are and who they have become.

1.2 Introduction to the Thesis

Human trafficking is an important development issue. It exists in various forms, but the focus of this research is trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation. Trafficking numbers are very difficult to measure due to the underground nature of the issue. In the past the International Labour Office (ILO) and the Walk Free Foundation were the two main organisations seeking to estimate trafficking numbers. However, the results of the two reports were often very different. In 2016, the ILO and Walk Free Foundation in partnership with the International Organisation of Migration combined to write the Global Estimates of Modern Slavery Report which was published in 2017 (ILO 2017). This report used new methodology from multiple data sources to estimate trafficking numbers. The report concluded that trafficking numbers are on the rise with a conservative estimate of 40.3 million people affected by trafficking at any given time (ILO 2017 p21) compared with an estimate of 27 million in 2008 (McSherry & Kneebone 2008 p67).

The prevalence of trafficking is linked with the growth of globalisation and a growing inequality within countries. Fewer economic opportunities exist within rural contexts, which leads individuals to migrate from rural to urban environments in search of better livelihood options for themselves and their families (MacMillan 2012 & Lee 2005). The increase in migration, creates a vulnerability in which trafficking can occur. Traffickers use the desperation of women who decide to migrate, to lure them to leave the protective environment of their family with promises of work in the city before selling them into the sex trade (Red Alert 2015 & Dasra 2013). India, the context for this study, is known as both a source, destination and transit country for human trafficking with the ILO estimating that 18.4 million Indian’s have been trafficked (ILO & Walk Free Foundation 2017 p27).

The importance of addressing human trafficking has been emphasised in the newly released sustainable development goals. Sustainable Development Goal 16 focuses on peace, justice

and strong institutions, and target 16.2 calls for the end of all forms of trafficking by 2030 (United Nations 2017). Trafficking has also become a cross-cutting issue within development with the eradication of trafficking also a target in Sustainable Development Goal 5 (target 5.2), gender equality and Sustainable Development Goal 8 (target 8.7), decent work and economic growth (ILO 2017). In order to eradicate human trafficking by 2030 much work needs to be done, and research is needed, to better understand the issue and to hear the voices of individuals who have been impacted by trafficking. This thesis contributes to development discourse on trafficking by exploring trafficked women's understanding and experiences of freedom as they exit the sex trade.

The majority of language in the literature regarding trafficking of women into the sex trade, emphasises victimhood, and women's need for rescue from the situation that they have found themselves in (Flowers 2001, Rafferty 2007, and Lau 2008). More recently, discourse has begun to acknowledge and explore the complexities and nuances within the lives of women who have been trafficked. This recognises that women, who have been trafficked, journey from forced sex work towards sex work through choice as they regain agency and power within their trafficking situation (Sano 2012). Viewing trafficked women as agents capable of becoming empowered is an important part of development interventions. This view also asserts that women are not revictimised by acknowledging that women are capable of making decisions for themselves.

This thesis uses development concepts of empowerment and agency as frames and seeks to apply these concepts to the context of women trafficked into the sex trade. These concepts when applied to the context of trafficking fit within hopeful post development thought, that enables an exploration of how women trafficked into the sex trade can enact agency to become empowered and experience freedom. Women trafficked into India's sex trade are not often portrayed as individuals capable of becoming empowered through their own actions and agency. In contrast, this thesis seeks to allow women to tell their own stories of exit from a trafficking situation highlighting their agency, and exploring their empowerment processes. My hope is that an empowering view may facilitate organisations working in this field to partner with trafficked women as they seek freedom.

A narrative inquiry methodology, discussed in depth in Chapter 4, was employed to assist this research meeting these objectives. Using a narrative approach allows women to share their stories and the meaning behind their stories (Chase 2005). Within social science research, it is

recognised that research is not simply an academic exercise that looks at finding ways to close gaps within existing literature. Social science research is also personal and subjective, with the researcher impacting on the nature of the research (Pinnegar & Daynes 2007). It is important that the personal positionality and motivation of a researcher is detailed to ensure that the process is as authentic as possible (O’Leary 2009). With this in mind, my personal motivation and positionality is explained below.

1.3 Personal Positionality and Motivation

My interest in individuals on the margins of society has stemmed from long standing personal beliefs and commitments. I am a 34-year-old, Pakeha¹ woman who grew up in a middle class Christian family in South Auckland, New Zealand. As a young adult I worked with several teenage girls in the New Zealand foster care system, building relationships, mentoring and journeying alongside them as they became independent adults. These experiences gave me a desire to make a difference in those who have experienced abuse and poverty and found themselves on the margins of society. This passion alongside my training as a registered nurse took me to Ethiopia where I volunteered in a rural health clinic for 18 months. In Ethiopia, I discovered the resilience of people, and the beauty that can be learnt from other cultures.

My involvement with women who had been trafficked into the sex trade began in early 2010, when I accepted a role in Kolkata, India to design and implement a health program for women who had successfully exited the sex trade. Shortly after taking up this assignment I began to learn more about the complexities of women’s lives, and proposed to expand the health program to include counselling and social work services. In 2013, I took over as Director of the Tamar Trust which sought to journey with women and their families that had been affected by the sex trade as they were looking for freedom. During the years that I spent working with women who had been trafficked into the sex trade, I have been amazed and inspired by the resilience and strength that they display, despite the trauma and abuse that they have experienced throughout their lives.

In my role at Tamar, I partnered with Freeset Bags and Apparel (FBA), a local business committed to employing women who wish to exit the sex trade. Through this relationship, I

¹ Pakeha is a Maori word used to describe non-Maori and Pasifika individuals who live in New Zealand.

approached FBA and the Freeset Women's Committee² about conducting research with women who had successfully exited the sex trade and were employed at FBA. The reasons for choosing this context were both academic and personal. Research among women who have been trafficked into the sex trade is limited and focused primarily around rescued minors (Rafferty 2007, Lau 2008, Kristoff 1996, Lim 1998). The ability to contribute to understandings on the freedom and empowerment processes of trafficked women by interviewing women who had chosen to leave the sex trade for themselves was an exciting opportunity. Personally, conducting research in Kolkata where I had been living and working for the past seven years made logistical sense. I had developed a fluency in the local language, as well as an understanding of the Bengali culture and trust with the women. These factors placed me in a unique position to be able to conduct the research. FBA leadership and the women's committee kindly agreed to the research and contributed to the formulation of the research proposal. Women working at FBA became key participants as they shared their life stories and exit narratives with me.

1.4 An Overview of Freeset Bags and Apparel

Freeset Bags and Apparel (FBA) is a private limited Indian fair trade company that offers employment to women who wish to exit Kolkata's sex trade. It was founded in 2001 with twenty women who made the choice to exit the sex trade, and now the Kolkata unit boasts a staff of over 200. The business works on "an upside-down model, where people are placed above profit". All profits from the business benefit the women through salary, health insurance, pension plans, and bonuses and are used to grow and expand the business (Freeset Bags and Apparel 2016). FBA partners with Tamar who provides training, counselling, health care, and social services to employees of FBA, as well as working in the red-light community to recruit women wishing to exit the sex trade. Therefore, when exploring how trafficked women exit the sex trade, women working at FBA would provide valuable insight in meeting the research objectives as outlined below.

1.5 Research Aims and Objectives

Based on the above explanations around trafficking and women's exit narratives, the overall aim of this study is:

² The Freeset Women's Committee is made up of managers and women who have successfully exited the sex trade, together they approve all research conducted within Freeset.

To explore trafficked women's understanding and experiences of freedom.

To achieve this aim two research questions and objectives were developed.

Research Question 1: What are the key strategies that women have applied when exiting a trafficking situation?

- To explore what particular strategies support a woman to exit a trafficking situation.
- To understand what particular obstacles are hindering a woman to exit a trafficking situation.

Research Question 2: What empowerment processes do women experience when exiting a trafficking situation?

- To identify moments that women observe as empowering and propel them towards freedom from their forced situation.
- To investigate what particular empowerment processes or situations have been experienced by women as facilitating their freedom from the sex trade altogether.
- To determine what role agency has in a woman's journey towards empowerment.

In answering these research questions and meeting the stated objectives, this thesis draws on methodological and theoretical frameworks described in the first sections of this thesis. The thesis outline is described further below, but first I make a brief comment on the limitations of the research.

1.6 Limitations of the Research

There are two main limitations to the study which relate specifically to the generation of data. Firstly, the sample size was small, due in part to the limitations of a Masters thesis, as well as the chosen methodology (which will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4). In this study I conducted narrative life stories with five participants, prioritising depth with each participant over a greater sample size. Secondly, all participants were employed by Freeset Bags and Apparel. This business only employs women directly out of the sex trade and promotes empowerment and freedom dialogues as part of the workplace culture. This workplace culture may influence the way in which participants shared their narratives and could bias the results. While this may be the case, and research with trafficked women who have exited the sex trade and are employed in other workplaces should be undertaken in the future, it was

important ethically to conduct this research within Freeset Bags and Apparel where there was existing trust and relationships.

1.7 Layout of the Thesis

This thesis is structured in seven chapters, a brief description of each chapter is given below.

Chapter 1 has introduced the area of the research and outlined the personal positionality and motivation behind the research. This chapter has also articulated the research aim, questions and objectives, and has set out the structure of the thesis.

Chapter 2 describes the theoretical background to the research, with a particular emphasis on empowerment, and agency. The concept of freedom is also discussed examining how freedom is defined and what impacts on an individual's experience of freedom.

Chapter 3 provides a background on trafficking and the sex trade in West Bengal. The chapter examines how the red-light district of Sonagacchi functions and the vulnerabilities women face towards trafficking. The avenues of exit identified within the literature are discussed, and the chapter also highlights cultural issues that impact on women's trafficking experience.

Chapter 4 focuses on the methodological issues pertaining to the research, including the narrative inquiry methodology, philosophical standpoint, and ethical issues involved in the study. Fieldwork experiences are also discussed highlighting the research processes and methods of data collection. The chapter closes with a discussion of the techniques used in the data analysis process.

Chapter 5 presents the findings of the research. The chapter explores how women trafficked into the sex trade were able to enact agency and become empowered as they moved through their trafficking experience towards exit from the sex trade. Women's experience of freedom is discussed highlighting that freedom is more complex than exit or empowerment.

Chapter 6 discusses the findings of the research, arguing that women trafficked into the sex trade are not simply victims in need of rescue. It explains how trafficked women have the tools to enact agency even in the confines of exploitation and their journey towards empowerment and exit from the sex trade. Returning to the overall aim of the research, this chapter also discusses trafficked women's understanding of freedom, highlighting that exit from the sex trade does not equate to freedom.

Chapter 7 concludes the thesis by reviewing the major themes of this research and the key findings in response to the research questions. This chapter concludes with a summary of women's experiences of freedom.

Chapter 2:

Women's Empowerment in the Context of Trafficking.

2.1 Introduction

The concepts of freedom, agency and empowerment are essential to development as well as for women who have been trafficked into the sex trade and are seeking to exit. As women enact agency, they become empowered, and this process of empowerment contributes towards finding freedom. This chapter explores women's empowerment in development, by defining the concepts and exploring the role that power plays in the process of empowerment. As power dynamics are shifted and an individual becomes empowered, he or she is able to enact agency across a wider range of choices and may journey towards greater freedom. These processes of becoming empowered, of developing agency and finding freedom will be explored in this chapter. A particular emphasis is given on the empowerment process within the Indian sex trade, which is the context for this thesis. These concepts create the theoretical framework for the study, and a sound understanding of empowerment, freedom, and agency are important to answering the research questions of this study.

2.2 Concepts of Women's Empowerment in Development

Empowerment is a contested term within development discourse and has many varying definitions. Empowerment was broadly defined by Kabeer (1999 p437) as the process by which those who are disempowered enact agency to become empowered, it entails a process of change. Van Kempen (2009 p466) expands on Kabeer's definition and describes the process of empowerment as "the expansion of a person's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this was previously denied to them". Stern et al. (2005) and Aslop et al (2006), describe empowerment as being conceptually very close to Sen's concept of enhancing capabilities, which aims to expand people's freedom to live the life that they value. Narayun (2002), explained that empowerment has both intrinsic and instrumental value and is relevant at both an individual and collective level (Narayun 2002). Having considered all of the above, for the purposes of this thesis Anderson and Sim's (2004 p2) definition of empowerment will be used, they describe empowerment as:

The process of awareness and capacity building, which increases the participation and decision-making power of citizens and may lead to transformative action which will change opportunity structures in an inclusive and equalising direction.

An empowering approach to development puts people at the centre of development and views them as the most valuable resource in solving development issues (Stern et al 2005 & Narayun 2002). A people centred and empowering approach to development aligns closely with this study which highlights the agency and empowerment processes of women trafficked into the sex trade, recognising that the women themselves are key to addressing the issue of trafficking.

Individuals and communities that are becoming empowered, demonstrate empowerment across four dimensions; economic, political, psychological, and social. Economic empowerment refers to an environment where there are safe and sufficient opportunities in the formal and informal sector for individuals to earn income for themselves and their families (Schyvens 1999). Political empowerment occurs when individuals have access to decision-making processes within their communities, nationally, and regionally, and have not just the power to vote, but also the power of voice and of collective action (Friedmann 1992). Psychological empowerment is often the result of an individual's successful action in the political and social domains. This dimension of empowerment can also occur when individuals are active in the process of making meaning out of their past and their current experiences and weaving difficult past experiences into a new story (Rowland-Serdar & Schwartz-Shea 1991).

An individual who is psychologically empowered shows self-confidence and optimism about the future and a strong sense of self-efficacy (Li et.al 2015). Social empowerment refers to individuals having access to certain bases of household production, for example, information, knowledge, skills, and participation in social organisations (Friedmann 1992). Empowerment exists on a continuum from disempowered to empowered; social, political, psychological, and economic dimensions of empowerment contribute towards an individual progressing along this continuum. It is possible that an individual can be empowered in one dimension but disempowered in other dimensions. Cambell and Mannell (2015) argue that when a person has empowerment across all dimensions and can make decisions from a wide variety of choices, they are empowered.

Empowerment of women is a critical element of gender equality, empowerment has a focus on identifying and addressing power imbalances and giving women more agency to manage

their own lives (Bustamante-Gavino, Ratlani, & Khan 2011). Rowlands (1997), pointed out that the empowerment of women is a gender issue, not just a women's issue. A key element of defining women's empowerment, as Khader 2014 states, is the expansion of women's agency. Decision making, choice, realising opportunities and potential and community action is what defines empowerment for women (Eyben & Napier-Moore 2009, SIDA 2011).

The issue of women in development entered the development discourse in the 1970's and there were two main schools of thought; the liberal mainstream women in development approach and the more socialist and feminist gender and development discourse (Hirshman 1995). Both women in development and gender and development thinking focused primarily on women's economic potential and their participation in economic markets (Parpart 2002). During the 1980's, development discourse began to splinter as questions were asked about the patriarchal nature of development practices. Some development academics from the South, for example Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN), called for a women's centred, grassroots development that would empower women. This splintering of development discourse led to a view of participation and empowerment as the building blocks for people orientated transformational development. This perspective was influenced by many feminists who saw this as an opportunity to promoting gender equality and women's empowerment (Freedman 2000 & Parpart 2002).

The empowerment of women in economic, political, psychological, and social spheres is crucial to their development. For empowerment to occur the existing power structures need to be addressed, the following section will discuss the issues of power within empowerment processes to determine how power relations can be shifted to enable empowerment.

2.3 The issues of power within empowerment and development

A key insight into empowerment is that it addresses power imbalances and involves a shift in power relations (Freedman 2000). To understand how these shifts can happen what power is, and an exploration of the different types of power is needed. Power is discussed widely within the development discourse as a contested term. For the purposes of this thesis, the concept of power will be summarised by highlighting three main ideas. The first idea is that power is a dynamic process between social entities and that power does not belong to an individual or a group exclusively, rather it can be viewed as a relationship (Neal and Neal 2011). When a shift in power takes place, this may mean a change in the relationship between an individual and an institution, or between two individuals.

There are many different types of power. Riger (1993), identifies three different types of power; ‘power over’, which infers dominance of a person, group or institution over another, whether this is explicit or implicit. The second type is ‘power to’, which refers to an individual or groups ability to act more freely in some realms of society, and the last type is ‘power from’, which indicates an ability to resist the power of others, and for a person to have more freedom to resist other demands (Cattaneo & Goodman 2015). Similar to Riger’s three types of power, Rowlands (1997) identifies four types of power. The first two types of power that Rowlands identified are the same as Riger’s, ‘power over’ and ‘power to’. The third type of power identified is ‘power with’; this is accumulated power of a like-minded group where the possibilities for action available outweigh the value of individual contribution. The final type of power is the ‘power within’; this refers to the strength of the human spirit that resides in each individual (Allsopp & Tallontire 2014, Rowlands 1997). For the purposes of this thesis ‘power within’, ‘power from’ and ‘power over’ are the types of power that have the most relevance. Chapter 6 of this thesis discusses how women trafficked into the sex trade harness the power within to become empowered.

Mayo (2004) identifies three dimensions of power and explores what would need to take place for each dimension to switch from disempowered to empowered. The first dimension that Mayo highlights is the unequal relationships where an individual or group demonstrates its ability to impose their will on another. This is the most obvious form of disempowerment, and many development programs focus on empowerment being a shift in this first dimension of power. This involves building effective communities from the top down, so that individuals and communities can participate effectively in consultations and have their opinions fed-back to decision makers (Narayan 2002 & Haugaard 2015). The second dimension is less visible and is the ability to limit the range of possibilities to be considered by an individual or group. Empowerment within the second dimension of power includes the power to challenge the decision makers to ensure that individuals and groups have their own priorities and projects as part of the development agenda (Mayo 2004).

The final dimension is often the most subversive and is the ability to shape people’s desires. This dimension of power determines the terms in which public debates take place and what is thinkable and unthinkable (Haugaard 2015). In order for communities and individuals to become empowered, power structures at all levels need to be challenged, going beyond what power imbalances can be easily seen, to more subversive power that shapes what individuals and communities believe to be possible. Empowerment within the most subversive dimension

of power consists of developing a critical understanding that could challenge vested interests and promote strategies to challenge sources of disempowerment and social exclusion (Narayan 2002, Mayo 2004). In the context of this study, the empowerment processes of trafficked women would include elements of each of the above dimensions. Trafficked women who are becoming empowered would be overcoming unequal power relationship, be able to challenge the limits placed on to their future and begin challenging the structures of disempowerment that exist within the red-light district.

Power is also conceptualised as a tension that exists between what individuals believe to be possible for themselves and what the external social realities are for that individual. There is a perception that a focus on power at one level detracts from the other level (Masterson & Owen 2006). However, both the individual and social conceptualisations of power are necessary and inseparably linked. Empowerment can become a bridging concept that crosses the boundary between the social and intrapsychic (that which takes place within the mind) worlds (Cattaneo & Goodman 2015). Empowerment links the inner mind, and what one believes to be possible with the external social realities.

All conceptualisations explained above are relational in nature. As women seek to shift power dynamics in order to become empowered, the regaining of power should not be used to exploit or hold power over others. Women's empowerment occurs when all forms of power imbalances are transformed, and women have the ability to challenge and outline the development agenda, as well as challenge sources of disempowerment and deep-seated structures of patriarchy.

2.4 Freedom as the means and end to development

Freedom is a broad term with many contesting definitions. This section explores definitions of freedom as well as how an individual's level of freedom can be analysed. I will review Amartya Sen's exploration on freedom and how it constitutes the end and the means of development. One aspect of freedom identified in the literature is agency, an individual's ability to make choices from a wide variety of options. Agency is a concept that is closely linked to empowerment with both concepts existing on a continuum and contributing towards a women's overall sense of freedom.

Development as freedom is a key concept in the development discourse. Unfreedom for many people is a daily reality; social, cultural and gender structures at different levels and through various relational dynamics all contribute to an individual's experience of unfreedom or

freedom. Freedom can be broadly defined as the real opportunity that people have, to accomplish what they value (Deneulin 2005). Freedom is also not a onetime event or consistent state but exists on a continuum where people journey towards freedom or away from freedom depending on their circumstances.

The concept of development as freedom has been popularised by the work of Amartya Sen (1999) and his analysis of freedom can be summarised in four main points. The first point is that the expansion of freedom constitutes the primary end and principal means of development. Secondly, development is then seen as the process of extending the real freedoms that people enjoy on a day to day basis (Sen 2001). Freedom also must be conceived in a holistic manner, that sees observed linkages between diverse kinds of freedoms that people either have or lack (Beyer 2014, Sen 1999). It is important that freedom is not seen to be one dimensional in nature, it is multifaceted and looks different for each individual person and community rather than a prescriptive definition. Sen's third point is that poverty in and of itself constitutes a lack of freedom (Graf & Schweiger 2014, Sen 1999). Sen recognises that poverty can be seen as a deprivation of capabilities and this is what creates a lack of freedom for people. Furthermore, Sen (2013) also determines that there is a reciprocal relationship that exists between individual freedom and social commitments, which makes attaining individual freedom possible.

Throughout Sen's discussions of freedom as development, he highlights five types of freedom that need to be present for development to occur. Political freedom, economic facilities, social opportunities, transparency, and protective security (Onditi & Odera 2017). The types of freedom identified overlap with the dimensions of empowerment discussed earlier, this infers that the process of finding freedom has a strong correlation to empowerment processes. The UN General Assembly (2000) also recognised that economic, social, cultural and political aspects of development are essential to individual's realising freedom.

Using Sen's concepts, development can be described as the removal of unfreedom's such as oppression, poor economic opportunities, and systematic social deprivation, alongside the expansion of human freedom to live life with autonomy (Graham 2017). However, for many people around the world, experiences of unfreedom are common in their day to day lives. The UN (2013) highlighted this commenting that for women in particular, attacks against their freedom occur at every stage of their lives from infancy through to old age. Unfreedoms may

occur at an environmental and infrastructural level, affecting almost everyone living in a given area (Warrington & Kiragu 2012). This could involve limited or no access to clean water, or healthcare due to poor infrastructure in a village or town. Unfreedoms are also economic, occurring at both a local and household level, as well as personal, impacting individuals.

When analysing an individual's level of freedom, freedom can be understood as positive freedom or negative freedom. Mainstream development economics typically views freedom as the absence of coercion and interference by others, particularly the absence of government interference in the market (Gasper & Van Staveren 2003). Viewing freedom in this manner is defined as negative freedom, it focuses on the absence of restraints that an individual, group or institution may exercise over another individual, group or institution. This basic understanding of freedom is often adopted as individual rights and liberties, with a sense that the less someone is impeded or interfered with their chosen course of action the more I am free (Einspahr 2010). Negative freedom however, fails to take into account the complex structures that affect our freedom.

Viewing freedom in positive terms concentrates on what a person can choose to do and achieve, rather than on the absence of any restraint that prevents an individual from achieving what they want to accomplish (Sen 2013). The concept of positive freedom asks the question 'how much, and in what ways am I governed?', rather than simply 'who governs me?' (Berlin 1998 p35). Freedom viewed in this way focuses on the ways in which individuals are systematically positioned in relation to the structures that either enable or constrain them. Sen (2005) describes these two aspects of freedom as opportunity, the absence of hindrances to action and process, the means for achieving and action.

It is important to understand these two contrasting views as in practice they will produce very different assessments of an individual's freedom. An example can be seen by a woman who is free from legal constraints to enter a public activity, but constrained by her commitments to care for old, young or infirm family members. Viewing this woman's situation through a lens of negative freedom would imply that she is free. Alternatively, a positive view of freedom would consider if the care is solely a self-fulfilling choice or a burden, considering what this woman is really able to do and be (Gasper & Van Staveren 2003). For the purposes of this thesis, the positive view of freedom will be used to allow for the complex effects that structures have on an individual's freedom.

The freedom that each individual enjoys (or does not enjoy) is qualified and constrained by the social, political and economic opportunities that are available to a person (Deneulin 2008). Determining what the freedom of women looks like, undoubtedly means taking into account the forces that subtly work to shape their choices, preferences, and actions.

Analysing freedom isolated from the contexts that have shaped women's choices ignores the complexity of the restrictions and opportunities that women face (Einspahr 2010). The forces that impact on women's actions are known as structures. Structures are created through processes of repeated enactment and will determine what an individual's range of possible actions might be. These structures will constrain and enable women differently depending on their location within the various structures (Kabeer 1999 & Einspahr 2010).

The social and cultural context that an individual is located in, plays a large role in what structures constrain women's freedom, for example the red-light district of Sonagacchi, India which will be explained in Chapter 3. Within India, deeply rooted gender structures of patriarchy impact on the freedom of women, the role of men reinforces gender stereo-typed roles of domination and control, while society encourages female subordination, submission, dependence, and respect for authority (Dash & Srividya 2014). Patriarchy within India permeates all areas of society with unequal divisions of labour, power over the allocation of resources, and decreased property rights for women (Ramamurthy 2000). In a society with strong patriarchal structures such as India, women who do not have a prominent male (father, husband, son) in their life to navigate the patriarchal systems, can find themselves confronted by gender structures that limit their agency and freedom (Das et al 2012). Gender structures are difficult for women to combat as they intersect with other structures of culture, family, and economics. When systems of patriarchy are overcome, a woman has the ability to enact agency within her context and this leads to her empowerment and freedom. The role of agency within freedom will be discussed in more depth below.

2.5 Agency within Development

Agency is closely linked with concepts of empowerment and freedom, recognising that agency can be a catalyst for empowerment processes and an aspect of achieving freedom. Agency is defined by Sen as the ability to act and bring about change as a participant in economic social and political actions (Sen 1999, Beyer 2014). Alternatively, Coulthard (2012) describes agency as the ability to make choices about one's life and to act on these choices to achieve a desired outcome. The UN (2013) comments that the agency of women is

one of the major mediators of economic and social change, and the consequences of women's agency are central features of development.

Agency has been conceptualised in relation to structure, prescribing that societal structures can determine individual behaviours (Stones 2007). Other conceptualisations emphasise the importance of individual agency and the capacity for individuals to (re)form their worlds (Deneulin 2008 & Evans 2002, Emirbayer, Mische 1998). More recently agency has been framed with a post-structuralist lens, this implies that expressions of agency vary over time and space and that even in settings that are extremely restrictive individuals will display some levels of agency (Robson et al 2007, Bell & Payne 2009, & Jeffrey 2011).

Individuals who have the ability to enact agency brings benefits that can be summarised as intrinsic, instrumental, and intergenerational. The intrinsic value of agency is the recognition that the ability to exercise choice is important in its own right (Fernandez et al. 2015). As well as having intrinsic value, agency also has instrumental value. Expanding agency is critical to bringing broader development gains and eliminating poverty (Alkire 2005). Agency also has intergenerational benefits. If women have greater personal agency their experiences are more likely to benefit their children, and their children are more likely to have even more agency than their mother had (Asah 2015). Thus, there may be a generational increase in agency, which as has already been discussed will impact on broader development goals.

The World Development Report (2012) highlighted the importance of women's agency in achieving development outcomes. The report determined five expressions of agency that were key to the empowerment and freedom of women. The first expression of agency consisted of having access and control over resources, this is measured by women's ability to earn and control income (Onditi and Odera 2017). Secondly, freedom of movement, measured by women's ability to decide their movements and mover freely outside of the home. The third expression of agency is freedom from the risk of violence which is measured by the prevalence of domestic, sexual, physical and emotional violence. Fourth, is women's ability to make decisions over family formation. This is measured by women's and girl's choice of when and whom to marry, as well as when and how many children to have. The final expression on women's agency is voice in society and influencing policy, which is measured through women's participation and representation in formal politics and

engagement in collective action (World Development Report 2012). These expressions of agency assist in determining women's level of agency across different spaces.

An individual's degree of agency can be described on a continuum of 'thin' to 'thick' agency (Klocker 2007). Thin agency refers to everyday actions and decisions that are carried out within highly restrictive environments, with few viable alternatives. Alternatively, thick agency describes having the ability to act within a broad range of options. Agency exists along a continuum and can be thickened or thinned by the environment an individual is located in. This continuum overlaps with the empowerment continuum as discussed earlier, where individuals move towards a place of empowerment as their agency thickens. Structures, contexts, and relationships can act as thickeners or thinners of an individual's agency by expanding or constraining their range of viable choices (Bell and Payne 2009). This view of agency shows a definitive link between agency and power along with a strong link between agency and the contexts within which people live. The terms thick and thin agency also convey a sense of layering or eroding of agency by the structures, and contexts that an individual finds themselves in.

Agency, in terms of the choices and actions that an individual or community makes, can either reproduce structures that impact on an individual's freedom or transform these structures (Bajaj 2009, Hays 1994). The ability for an individual to act positively and contribute towards transforming structures varies across space and time. The intensity and nature of structures shift with the passing of time and structures can also become more noticeable at moments in people's lives (Jeffrey 2012). There are multiple structures of dominance that impact on an individual's ability to enact agency, and an understanding of how individuals navigate plural intersecting structures of power is needed to fully grasp the concept of agency.

Social and cultural norms are one of the structures that can impact on an individual's agency. The World Development Report (2012) comments that social norms can prevent or promote gains in women's agency. Social norms can influence the expectations, values and behaviours that a woman has. An example can be seen in women who grow up with a patriarchal society such as India, the social norms can impact on what Indian women deem to be possible for themselves or their daughters. Sen (2005) defines the influence of social norms on an individual's agency as adaptive preferences.

Poveda and Roberts (2018) state that a person's understanding of the world is an outcome of the culture and social norms that they have been exposed to. An individual's values, beliefs and ideas are often assimilated without thought by the dominant narrative of their society. This narrative can be internalised by the individual even when the narrative includes negative ideas about their own race, gender or class. Once these narratives are internalised they can impact on a woman's ability to determine the kind of life that she has reason to value (her agency) as her own preferences have adapted to conform with the social norms and values dominant within her society. In the context of trafficked women in India, which will be discussed in Chapter 3, this can impact on their experience of freedom and empowerment processes. The process of empowerment is discussed further in the following section.

2.5 Empowerment as Process

The empowerment process is underpinned by a shift in power for an individual. To facilitate this shift two distinct areas need to be addressed. The first is a shift in the consciousness of people. For women's empowerment to be successful, the limiting normative beliefs and expectations that keep women in situations of subordination and dependency need to be overturned (Collins 2002 & Hernandez et al 2005). The restrictive social and cultural norms need to be challenged and the institutions of everyday life that sustain inequity also need to be challenged (Cornwall 2016). The second shift is with the engagement of culturally embedded normative beliefs, understandings and ideas about gender, power, and change (Cornwall 2016). This shift takes the process of women's empowerment beyond the individual to address broader gendered inequalities within a particular cultural context. Focusing on these two areas for facilitating empowerment has often been overlooked for more formal shifts such as increasing women's access to resources and opportunities and enacting laws and policies that benefit women (Sandler and Rao 2012). The reality is that all of these areas are needed to promote individual and institutional change both a formal and informal level and create a pathway for women to journey towards empowerment (Cornwall 2016).

Empowerment is an iterative process, a person who lacks power sets a goal that is orientated towards increasing power, the person then acts, making progress towards that goal and observes and reflects on the impact of his or her actions (Cattaneo & Goodman 2015). Throughout this process the person draws upon their own skills, knowledge, community resources, support systems, and self-efficacy; this process of empowerment is modelled in

Figure 2.1 below. As shown in Figure 2.1 the empowerment process is not linear and a person may cycle through components (goal setting, actions, impact) multiple times to achieve particular goals, re-evaluating as they progress. The aim of the empowerment process is to change an individual's social influence, not just an intrapsychic change, highlighting the importance of the social context. Not all people who lack power have an equal chance or becoming empowered, the empowerment process takes place in a context where structures exists for some individuals to have more power than others (Bennett Cattaneo & Chapman 2010).

The empowerment process model (Figure 2.1) begins with the setting of personally meaningful power orientated goals. Cultural values and context will influence the types of goals and the choice of avenues to reach goals. Understanding the nature of such goals and how they differ across contexts is critical to facilitating the process of empowerment (Cattaneo & Goodman 2015). Central to the empowerment process model are concepts of self-efficacy, knowledge, and competency. Self-efficacy includes an individual's sense of agency or their belief about their ability to achieve the goals they have set for themselves (Riger 1993). Once a goal has been identified, and the individual has a sense that it can be accomplished, knowledge of the relevant social context including power dynamics, resources needed, possible routes to goal attainment need to be identified so that a course of action can be set (Zimmerman 1995). Once a woman has the knowledge of what is required to reach a goal, her actual skill level becomes important (Gutierrez 1991). Knowing what is needed to achieve a goal is not the same as having the competence to be able to act on this knowing to achieve the goal.

Figure 2.1: The Empowerment Process Model

Source: Cattaneo & Goodman (2015) p 84.

In order to achieve goals, an individual must take action (see Figure 2.1). The action phase of the empowerment process model, is shaped by the pieces of the process that come before it. The action plan is driven and motivated by the personal value of the goal that was set, and informed by relevant knowledge and carried out using relevant skill. Action that leads to liberation must be generated by a person's perception of her situation (Bennett Cattaneo & Chapman 2010). Following the action, the model describes that an assessment of the impact of the action takes place by the goal setter. An individual's perception of their personal impact is influenced by many factors, including cultural beliefs about personal control, their experience of discrimination, and structural obstacles such as gender bias to their goals. As an individual reflects on their impact it highlights obstacles which reveal power dynamics and leads to the refinement of goals and the process begins again (Bennett Cattaneo & Chapman 2010). The understanding of the empowerment process is relevant to this thesis which

explores how this process of empowerment works for women who have been trafficked into the sex trade.

2.6 The empowerment process in relation to women in the sex industry

Women's empowerment literature often portrays women trafficked into the sex trade as victims, who are naïve, innocent, powerless, and who passively submit to their circumstances as escape is virtually impossible (Kristoff 1996, Lim 1998, UNICEF 2003, Flowers 2001, Rafferty 2007, and Lau 2008). This view frames the issue in a very narrow way obscuring complexities and diversities in the lives of women who have been trafficked (Sano 2012). Studies conducted in South East Asia with women who were trafficked into the sex trade show that in the midst of oppressive circumstances trafficked women were able to demonstrate capability, empowerment, resilience, and degrees of agency (Montgomery 2007, Taylor 2005 & Rubenson et al. 2005).

Issues of sex work, prostitution, and trafficking have been debated in academia. In the 1980's U.S feminist movement there was much debate around prostitution and related concepts of empowerment and agency. This radical feminist anti-prostitution position had been side lined by academia. However, the 1990's saw a rise in debate and discussion of trafficking for sexual exploitation and this contributed to a re-engagement in the debate about women and sex work (Thompson 2001 p133). On one side of the debate, are activists who align themselves with a radical feminist approach that prostitution is an institution of male domination. On the other side of the debate are those that see prostitution as a legitimate form of work; and aim to distinguish sex work from forced prostitution; and migration for sex work from trafficking (Freeman 1989 p75).

The two opposing sides of the debate present their position as being clear-cut; however, the issues of power and agency contribute to making the issue of sex work very complex (Brunovskis & Surtees 2008 p62). When examining the literature, it appears that sex work in the west is assumed to be "free", but sex work in developing countries is assumed to be "forced" (Miriam 2005 p10). This assumption relates back to the women in development discourses which sees women from developing countries as powerless victims in need of rescue by western feminists.

Indian scholarship has experienced a similar debate in framing how sex work and sex workers are viewed. Kapur (2001) centred on the issue of sex work, and whether sex work constitutes violence against women and contradicts Indian cultural values, and whether

women involved in the commercial sex trade are victims incapable of choice. Gangoli (2007) describes three ways in which Indian feminist groups view sex work. The first is keeping silent on the issue given the primary focus of Indian feminists on promoting the heterosexual monogamy within marriage. The second view is to see sex work through the lens of coercion, violence, and victim-hood. The final view is to hold sex work as a matter of choice and identity, as proposed by sex worker collectives. Pro- sex worker groups argue that labelling all sex workers as victims denies women's agency and call for their empowerment approaching the issue from the perspective of the women (George et al 2010).

Empowerment approaches for working amongst sex workers emphasises transforming structures and power dynamics that will allow sex workers to exercise greater agency in their lives (Jordan 2002). Empowerment approaches recognise that agency in some aspects of a sex workers life may be thinner but acknowledges that nonetheless, sex workers are capable of making strategic choices that can benefit themselves and their families (Swendeman et al 2015 & Sanders et al 2009).

2.7 Chapter Summary

Empowerment is an iterative process in which power imbalances are addressed and power relations are shifted. As women become empowered they explicitly and implicitly challenge social, gender, cultural and political structures that create unfreedom within a given society, this leads to a greater sense of freedom for women. Closely linked with the process of empowerment and freedom is agency. An understanding of agency explored in this chapter, is that women who are in an exploitative environment and disempowered can employ the 'thin agency' that these women have to begin the empowerment process. Women do this by setting small goals that increase her range of choices. As a woman becomes successful her agency 'thickens', and she sets new goals continuing the process of empowerment. Freedom, agency, and empowerment are all impacted by the social, political and economic environment that an individual finds themselves in. In this thesis I argue that women trafficked into the sex trade in West Bengal, India cultivate agency and empowerment for themselves and that this becomes a significant component of their experience of freedom. With this in mind, it is important to understand the landscape of sex trafficking within West Bengal, India which will be explored in the following chapter.

Chapter 3:

Exploring the Landscape of Sex Trafficking In West Bengal.

3.1 Introduction

Trafficking for the purposes of commercial sexual exploitation is a global development issue. Traffickers prey on vulnerable people who are in search of better livelihood options for themselves and their extended family. In India, sex trafficking primarily occurs within its borders, but India also receives trafficked persons from Bangladesh and Nepal. A trafficked person's experience within India is complex and multifaceted, not a simple one-time event.

This chapter seeks to explore the issue of sex trafficking, why it exists and how trafficking works at a global level. The chapter will then discuss vulnerabilities to trafficking with a particular focus on India and the specific north eastern state of West Bengal. This chapter will also discuss the complexities of a woman's trafficking experience in a West Bengal context by closely examining a women's trafficking journey and possible points of exit. Finally, I will discuss what is being done to support trafficked persons within West Bengal by discussing current rehabilitation and reintegration strategies.

3.2 Sex Trafficking as a Global Issue

The US Department of State in the 2015 Trafficking in Persons Report define trafficking as "the act of recruiting, harbouring, transporting, providing or obtaining a person for compelled labour or commercial sex acts through the use of force, fraud, or coercion" (Trafficking in Persons Report 2015 p 29). Trafficking can be identified by the presence of three factors; conduct associated with moving people (this can be across or within borders), using some form of coercion or deception and thirdly for the purposes of exploitation (Coghlan & Wylie 2011, and Hynes 2010). Trafficking is not necessarily a permanent or life long situation, but with the use of psychological coercion victims of trafficking may never leave the exploitative situation (Bales et. al 2009). Psychological coercion involves ensuring that the trafficked individual believes that there are no alternatives for their lives, and that the situation they find themselves in is their fate.

This chapter will review the literature of one particular form of trafficking, which is trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation. The Trafficking in Persons Report (2015, p 7) states “that when an adult engages in a commercial sex act, such as prostitution, as the result of force, threats of force, fraud, coercion or any combination of such means, that a person is a victim of trafficking”. Sex trafficking may also occur within the debt bondage paradigm, where individuals are required to remain in prostitution until debts are paid off. Gupta et al (2011) makes the distinction that when dealing with an individual under the age of 18 it is not necessary to prove force, coercion, or fraud. Rather any minor who has been moved from one area to another and is exploited within the sex trade can be characterised as a victim of human trafficking.

Trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation is not confined to one particular region or continent, or limited to developing countries (Barner, Okech, & Camp 2014). Globally an estimated 4.8 million people are enslaved for the purposes of sexual exploitation, of this number 73% come from Asia and the Pacific (International Labour Office 2017 p39). All countries throughout the world are engaged in human trafficking as source, transit and destination points (International Organisation for Migration 2017 p3). Trafficking is one of the fastest growing organised crimes, it is profited by traffickers around the world with estimated annual earnings of \$150 billion USD of which \$99 billion USD comes from trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation (ILO 2014 p13).

Trafficking has become a global issue for many developing countries. However, this issue does not only affect developing countries but also people within developed countries. Growing inequality between the rich and poor within countries and across countries as well as a growing interconnectedness across the world has resulted in increased migration in order to seek better livelihood options (2015 Trafficking in Persons Report). High levels of inequality coupled with the desire for migration, combine to create opportunities for traffickers to exploit and traffic individuals seeking better livelihood options outside of their city or country. Governments have responded to this by increasing border controls and having stricter laws around irregular migration. These controlling practices, however, are not sufficient to address trafficking which is caused by global inequality and a desire for the poor to seek job opportunities within tight labour markets.

In an Asian context, labour markets are very tight and there is a significant gap in earning potential between potential labour supplier areas and potential destination economies. This

occurs in an environment where there are only a few legal immigration channels to allow workers to enter more developed areas of Asia (Skeldon 2000). These factors contribute to a shift along the continuum towards involving some kind of illegal element in migration practices. Traffickers use the illegal aspects of the migration process to induce fear of the individual being returned to their home country or prosecution by authorities. The fear of being prosecuted or returning home creates an environment where the trafficker can exploit people seeking improved livelihood options. In some situations, this exploitation leads to women being sold into the sex trade.

Nepal and Bangladesh are particularly prone to trafficking because of the shared land borders with India. There is free movement between the Indian and Nepali border, and as a result many poor Nepalese cross the border into India in search of work (Laurie et al 2015).

Traffickers target people around border towns with the false promise of work opportunities, yet often individuals are sold into sex slavery or bonded labour. Partition of the India and Bangladesh subcontinent in 1947 and subsequent movements of the boundary that gave rise to Bangladesh in 1971 has led to the boundary passing through densely populated areas.

Many people cross the India - Bangladesh border every day much of which is done without the visas or travel permits (Gosh 2015).

Migration in and of itself will not always lead to a person being trafficked, providing opportunities for better livelihoods within trafficking prone areas and to providing opportunities for safe migration is a potential way to combat human trafficking. Safe migration is focused on three main areas: Firstly to provide a more equal power relationship with others that they meet along the way, thus leading to a decreased chance of exploitation; secondly, providing knowledge which may be required for a migrating individual to protect themselves from abuses in migration and work; thirdly, tracing a person's migration and registering their migration plans at home provides a way of tracking and tracing if trafficking does occur (Global Alliance against Traffic in Women (GAATW) 2010). Small Non-Profit Organisations in Latvia and Nepal have tried to implement safe migration policies with good success but despite its success, these policies have not been taken up at a national level (GAATW 2010).

Not all trafficking takes place across borders, however. Trafficking can also take place within borders, particularly from a rural setting to an urban setting (Kubasek & Herrera 2015). It is estimated that when people migrate from rural to urban areas between 1-2 million people are

sold into domestic sex trafficking every year (Countryman-Roswurm & Bolin 2014). The scope of domestic sex trafficking is much harder to define and determine because it can often be perceived to have been a choice unless the trafficked person is rescued during transit or initiation phases. Domestic sex trafficking in India is more prevalent than trafficking across borders with an estimated 90% of sex trafficked persons coming from other parts of India (Red Alert 2015 p26).

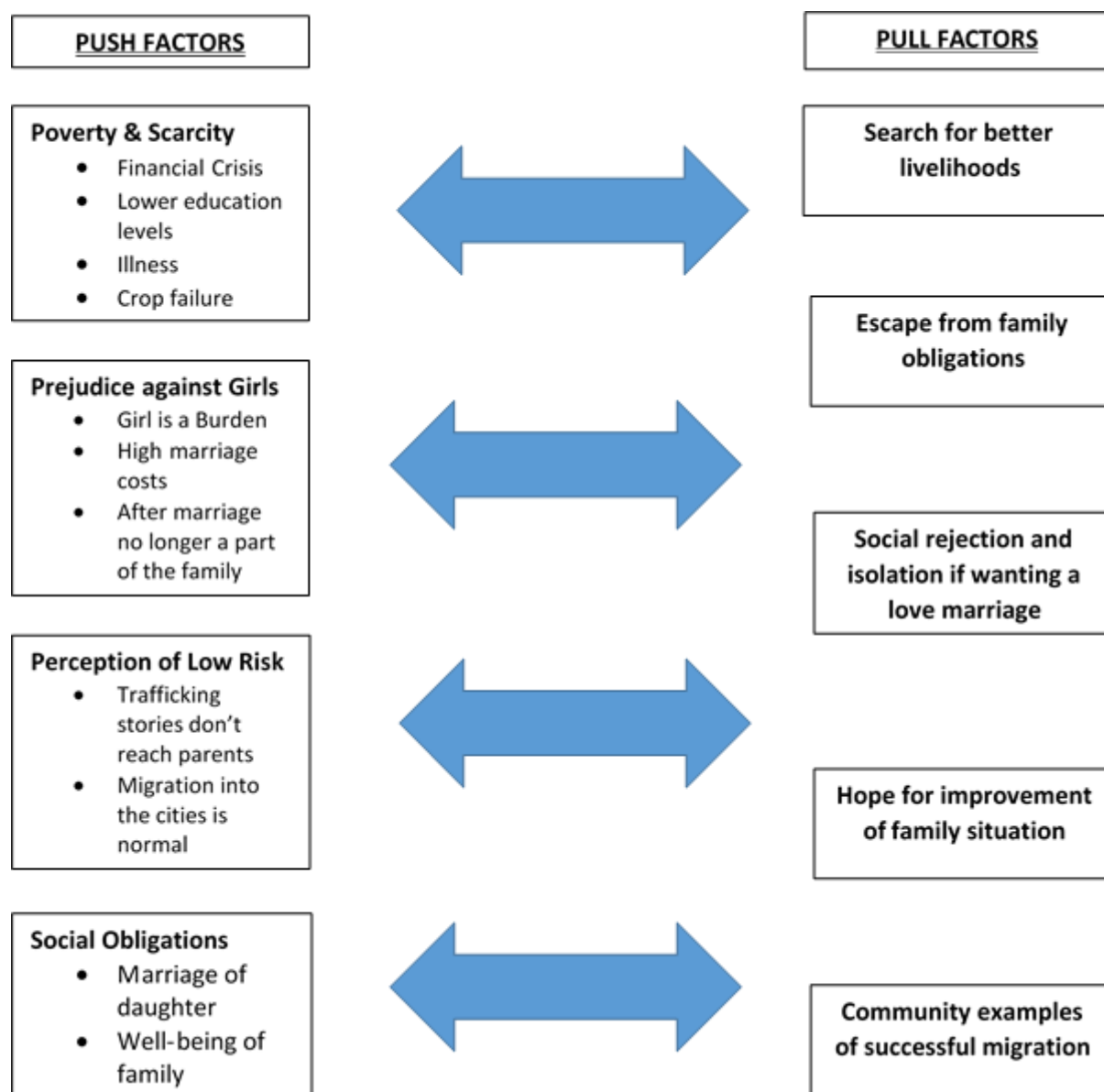
Cultural issues such as the promotion of a male child and the devaluation of a girl child combined with economic issues of poverty and lack of job opportunities for the person vulnerable to being trafficked, create an environment in which trafficking can take place. The complexity of vulnerabilities towards trafficking along with under development makes it a difficult issue to address. The vulnerabilities to sex trafficking in an Indian context will be explored in more depth below.

3.3 Vulnerabilities to Sex Trafficking in India

Poverty, decreased livelihood options, social obligations, lack of education, lack of awareness, and prejudice against a girl child combine to create an environment where women and girls become extremely vulnerable to trafficking in India. The desperation for improved economic opportunities outside the home means that many poor families choose to ignore the risks associated with female migration and seek better opportunities in the city (Dasra 2013). These vulnerability factors are both push and pull factors summarised in Figure 3.1. Push factors consist of reasons why an individual may feel pressured to leave their home country or village, whereas pull factors represent the reasons why an individual may be drawn towards a new city or country.

As Figure 3.1 shows, poverty is seen to be one of the major vulnerabilities to trafficking. Poverty makes many women across any number of countries vulnerable to being trafficked for the purposes of sexual exploitation (Barner, Okech, & Camp 2014). For example, in Albania women are enticed with offers of employment as nannies, or in restaurants and are then trafficked to Italy or Greece to be sold into prostitution (Van Hook, Gjermani & Haxhimeri 2006). Similarly, a trafficker may target a poor rural family in India, offering to marry the daughter without dowry and then selling her into prostitution.

Figure 3.1 Push and pull factors that contribute towards a vulnerability to being trafficked



Source: Adapted from Red Alert (2015, p29) and Dasra (2013, p10)

Due to poverty, many people from economically struggling countries seek better opportunities outside their own country. Hence, poverty has led to a large movement of skilled and unskilled laborers (Collins 2014). The rise of human trafficking numbers is said to coincide with an increase in female migration over the past 30 years (Hennink & Simkhada 2004, p308). Women are migrating within or across borders due to economic crisis, conflict, a sense of adventure, curiosity, or simply in search of better livelihood options for themselves and their families (Mai 2013). Research has shown that increase in women's migration and

susceptibility to trafficking are linked, and that as a result, tighter border controls and campaigns that discourage the migration of women has increased. However, tighter border controls does not decrease vulnerability but rather pushes trafficking further underground (Cho 2013 & Meshkovska et. al 2015). In most cases the need to escape poverty and search for alternative livelihood options outweigh the risk involved. Tighter border controls mean women left to seek out irregular ways of crossing borders increasing the chance of a women being trafficked while seeking to migrate.

In the Indian context, poverty and the subsequent lack of education are factors that lead to increased vulnerability of trafficking. Having a good education does not stop a person from being trafficked but the likelihood of them being trafficked is less (Wheton et al 2010).

According to the National Human Rights Commission, 71% of all trafficking victims were illiterate with only 14% having received a primary school education, this is compared to the national average of 80% who have a primary school education (Nair 2005 p83). The lack of education and early dropout rates are linked to the livelihood of a family. If a family has to choose to withdraw one child from school, it will be a daughter as the investment in her education is seen to have no long-term benefit for the family. At first, she will help around the home with domestic work, then in most cases, her family will seek out marriage or a job prospect for her in the city (Silverman et al 2007). The reduced levels of education and equality for females results in a greater risk of educational and financial illiteracy which in turn increases the vulnerability for traffickers to prey on and exploit these individuals.

Times of financial difficulty within a family also create vulnerability for trafficking to occur. In many rural Indian villages jobs are only available during harvest season. Outside of this season many people have to migrate and look for alternative work and they lack access to legitimate and affordable migration programs. As a result, rural men's lives are characterised by economic hardship, and a struggle to fulfil their responsibilities and maintain a good reputation in the community. Traffickers will exploit this situation by approaching the household during seasons of scarcity or crisis such as crop failure, death of the breadwinner, and serious disease. They will offer jobs, money and/or marriage for their daughters (Red Alert 2015).

Within Indian culture, the head of the household is usually male, either a father or the eldest son. The position of head of the household comes with the responsibility of providing for the entire family, this may be through his own work, or by arranging work for his children or

suitable husbands for his daughters. (Das et al 2012). The responsibility that the head of the household carries for financial stability, may make him more likely to agree to allowing his daughter to leave the family home for employment opportunities or marriage. Proposing opportunities of employment or marriage are the main strategies that recruiters will use as meet with family before the trafficking takes place. The promise of a job or finding a husband for a daughter without paying dowry means that a family no longer need to put money aside needs to put money aside for a wedding. Further, a daughter with a job will be expected to send money back to her family which provides instant relief to the family suffering from a crisis situation. The head of a poor household struggles to see beyond the current economic demands and takes up a trafficker on his/her offer in the hope that it will lead to economic security for the entire family (Red Alert 2015).

Within India, the elevation of males and the corresponding mind set that devalues females increases the vulnerability for females to be trafficked. Daughters are seen as a burden to their families because of poor employment prospects, marriage expenses, and dowry (Sev'er 2006). Poverty and cultural norms of gender inequality cause fathers to bypass the risks involved in sending their daughter away from the village. This is not done maliciously with the knowledge that she will more than likely be trafficked, but with the hope that by sending her away they can improve the lives of their family and their daughter (Red Alert 2015).

Another push factor which can create a vulnerability of being trafficked is that of a perception of low risk. Migration in search of work is a normal part of Indian life. Rural communities all contain families that have members working in a different location sending money back to the family. These families, particularly in a rural setting, are often the most economically stable. These situations where migration has been successful and has eased the financial burden of a family contribute to a perception of low risk of being trafficked, and encourage other families to send family members to the city for work (Dasra 2013).

However, the stigmatisation that exists around the sex trade and trafficking means that accounts of trafficking will rarely reach the village level. Families who have had members that have gone “missing” or have been sold into the sex trade often remain silent due to the fear of communal rejection and social isolation. This silencing reinforces the low-risk perception attached with migration and creates vulnerability to trafficking. Fathers willingly send their daughters with recruiters to the city as they believe that their daughter are entering into legitimate work and will be able to provide financially for the family (Red Alert 2015).

In positive scenarios these recruiters legitimately place people in work, and in other cases recruiters may in fact turn out to be traffickers.

3.4 Sex Trafficking in West Bengal, India

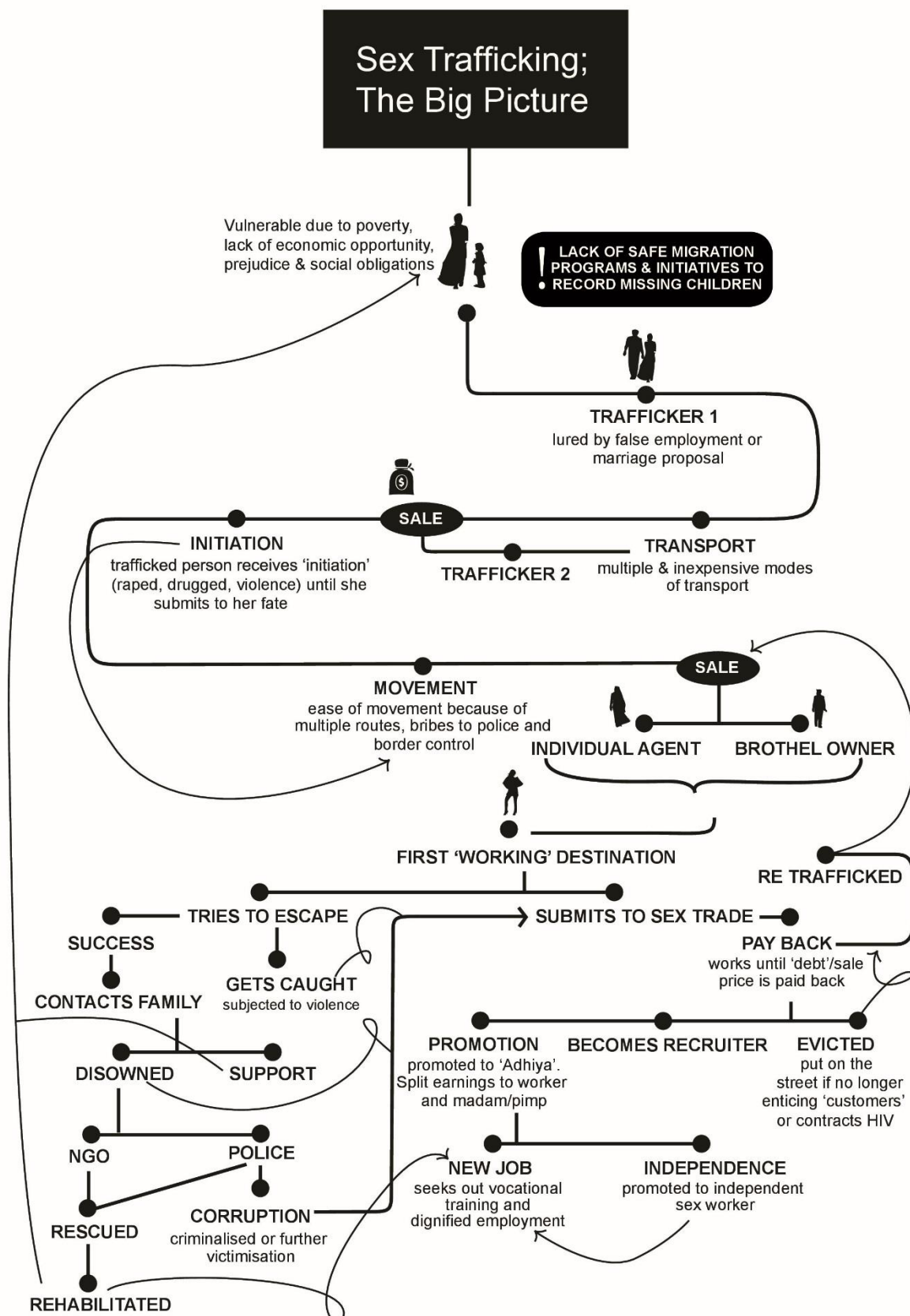
India has been identified as a country with a serious and widespread sex trafficking problem (Joffres et. al 2008). According to the global slavery index, India ranks fourth worst, with over 18 million people having been described as enslaved (Global slavery index 2017).

Despite preventative steps by the Indian government, traffickers have become more organised and have expanded (UNODC 2013). Sex trafficking has expanded to the point where almost every state is affected. According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) trafficking cases in India have risen 92% over a six-year period between 2009 and 2014 (Mallapur 2016 p3).

Ninety percent of India's trafficking occurs within borders and affects those from the most disadvantaged of social strata, such as lower cast Dalit's, people from tribal communities, and religious minorities (US State Department 2015). The most common destinations for domestic trafficked persons are Kolkata, Mumbai, Delhi, Gujarat, and along the India – Nepal border. The remaining 10% of trafficked persons are brought from Bangladesh or Nepal (Joffres et. al 2008 p 2).

Figure 3.2 describes the big picture of sex trafficking in India with a particular emphasis on West Bengal. Sex trafficking in India is a complex, dynamic system; with multiple locations and sales that take place. At the source, there exist vulnerabilities which make a person more likely to be trafficked, traffickers use these vulnerabilities to successfully recruit and sell people. As a next step the trafficked person is then moved to another location, here the violence and initiation begin. From these first steps, women are moved into their working location to begin their life as sex workers. As shown by Figure 3.2 the opportunities for exit are few and fraught with risk for the trafficked person. The wavy lines in Figure 3.2 represent the complexity of moving through each stage and intertwined nature of each position. Throughout each stage, the trafficked person is subjected to physical, psychological, and sexual abuse. It is the complexity, and high levels of abuse that make exit, and recovery, so difficult for a trafficked person in addition to the physical constraints to exit.

Figure 3.2 The Complexity of Sex Trafficking in India



Source: Author, adapted from Red Alert. (2015) pg 89

Figure 3.2 begins with girls or women who are willing to go to the city for work, they will usually be passed on to another person who will facilitate the transportation, the transporter will receive a small fee for doing this. Within India, there are multiple and inexpensive ways of moving about the country. Transporters will use the multiple transport routes to facilitate the trafficking of girls and women (Dhungana 2006). A transporter will take a woman to a pre-determined location where she will be sold and receive her initiation. This location is almost always not the red light area or brothel where she will 'work' (US State Department 2015). The money for her sale minus the transporter fee will be given to the recruiter in the village.

A girl or woman's initiation can often be her most traumatic experience. Until this point, the trafficked person believes that she will do legitimate work in the city, or that she is moving to the city to be with their new 'husband's' family. During this period of time, the trafficked person is often drugged, raped, and beaten. Customers will pay a high premium for the opportunity to initiate a virgin girl through rape and violence (Silverman et al 2011).

Traffickers then use the stigma of rape and sexual violence as well as continued physical and sexual abuse to force women to submit to their fate as sex workers. At this point, the amount of violence is dependent on the woman's level of 'compliance'. During this period of time, the trafficked person will be isolated from other sex workers and locked in a room so that she is unable to escape (Sarkar et al 2008).

Once it is determined that the trafficked person has been suitably initiated into the sex trade and is now 'compliant' with customers, she will then be moved on to her first working destination. This could be a brothel, private residence or massage parlour. There is an ease of movement from initiation location to the first working destination (see Figure 3.2) because of multiple routes and bribes which are paid to police and border control officers (Sarkar 2015). Once the trafficked person arrives at her first working destination she is again sold to a brothel owner or individual agent. This price most often becomes the 'debt' that she must repay before she receives any income from her sex work (Kotiswaran 2011).

At any time from her initiation through to her first working destination, a trafficked person may try to escape. If a person is caught, then she will be put back into the initiation phase with higher levels of violence and sexual abuse as punishment for running away. The traffickers will also use psychological abuse to reduce their self-worth until the trafficked person believes that they deserve to be in the sex trade and this is now what their life will be

like (Rajan 2011). If the trafficked person is successful in escaping, she will often try to contact her family and report what has happened. If the family is supportive then the trafficked person will return to the village and her family. However, in many cases because of the large levels of stigma associated with sex work and rape the trafficked person may be disowned by her family. This abandonment reinforces the physiological abuse that was received during her initiation phase, and as a result, she will return 'willingly' to the sex trade. The vulnerabilities that led her to be trafficked, however, still remain and this leaves her at high risk of being re-trafficked (Dasra 2013).

Another possibility is that the trafficked person may be rescued. There are non-governmental organisations (NGO's) in India who work with police to tackle the issue of trafficking persons for commercial sexual exploitation. Together NGO's and police perform raids to rescue women and girls who have been trafficked. This interception by police may occur while a girl is in transit or when she is in a brothel, private residence or massage parlour. The rescue of a trafficked person is also complicated and has the potential not to be successful. Police are known to "protect" brothel owners in exchange for a monetary fee. In such instances, brothel owners will quickly shift new or under aged girls to another location (Gaswami & Lagon 2013). This means that when the police show up there is no-one to rescue and therefore the brothel owner or manager cannot be prosecuted.

If the raid is successful, the trafficked person is placed in a shelter home. Shelter homes could be either government or private. Government homes are grossly under resourced. NGO homes vary in funding and will have services directly proportional to their resources. These shelters range in quality and services offered, some NGO's run aftercare homes that offer intensive counselling, support, and care. However, the government also run aftercare homes that tend to be under-resourced and lacking facilities. Often in these government shelter homes, women and girls can be further mistreated and abused. Both NGO and government shelter homes do family studies and send the trafficked person home when safe to do so. The depth of a family study and follow up support is varied and often determined by the amount of funding and resources that the aftercare home has (Padney, Tewari, & Bhowmick 2013).

In most cases, neither escape nor rescue occurs, and a trafficked person is forced to submit to the sex trade. This submission to the sex trade does not mean that the exploitation ends, rather the trafficked person is then within a chukri system. A Chukri system is when a sex worker is

being owned and controlled by a madam (the person who manages the brothel), whilst in this system no income of any kind is received for sex work that she performs. In this system, there are several factors that are used to control and manipulate a person. A trafficked person is psychologically controlled, she is told daily that she “deserves this”, that “if she tries to escape the police will arrest her and put her in prison”, and that “she is now ruined and can do nothing else with her life” (Hennink & Simkhada 2004). These messages are interspersed with the manipulation of kind words, motherly like affection, and gift giving. The combination of trauma and mixed messages create a psychological dependence on the madam and an acceptance that this is now her fate.

A trafficked person will stay in a *chukri* system until her ‘debt’³ has been paid off. The madam will constantly add expenses to this debt for food, clothing, and other items purchased on behalf of the woman or girl. This amount will then be matched against the money coming in from her customers. The trafficked person under a *chukri* system never knows exactly how much a customer pays for her services and so the madam will often exploit this by falsifying how much money is received, thus keeping her in debt for longer and bringing greater financial benefit to the madam. Once the ‘debt’ is close to being paid off the madam, depending on the trafficked women’s age and earning potential, will re-sell her to a different brothel and madam (Hennink & Simkhada 2004). The trafficked woman then must repay this new debt before she is able to receive any income for the sex work she performs. This exploitative cycle usually occurs three times before a woman is sold into an *adhiya* system.

Adhiya in Hindi means half, in this system the earnings received from sex work are split in half between the madam and sex worker. Once a woman is moved into an *adhiya* system, she begins to receive some money for herself for the first time since she was trafficked. Earnings are split between the madam and sex worker 50 /50. As in the *chukri* system, the madam will often falsify the earnings to gain a better financial benefit. Many of the women trafficked have not received an education and so do not know basic mathematics. This leaves them vulnerable to be financially exploited by the madam. In this system, a sex worker has no say over who her customers are, how many customers she is with per day, or if she works that day. All of these decisions are made by the madam. The madam is responsible for arranging the customers, providing food and shelter. All of the remaining expenses are paid for by the sex worker. Women within this system will often try to save some money while working

³ The amount the madam purchased her for.

within this system and send it back to the village, as well as save to move into a contract or flyer system where they can regain a certain amount of control.

In a contract system, sex workers rent a brothel on contract, they pay a daily rate for their room and have complete functional independence. The room rate is extremely high compared with other, similar, non-brothel rooms, and they will need to on average, see two to three customers to pay their rent for the day. They may also use the services of a dalal (a tout or pimp who will arrange customers for sex workers) to recruit customers to which they would also pay the standard 25% of what each customer pays (Kotiswaran 2011). A sex worker may also decide to become a 'flying sex worker'. Flyers will travel into the red light area on days they wish to work, and they will usually pay a small negotiated fee to a brothel keeper for the use of a room. This fee will be paid per customer; women may also employ the services of dalal and pay the 25% fee per customer (Sleightholme and Sinha 1997 p 11 & Kotiswaran (2011) p 151).

Sex workers are constantly at risk of being evicted; if it is determined that they are no longer enticing customers, or are no longer being able to pay their daily rent then they face the risk of being evicted onto the street. Due to the stigma of sex work within India evicted women are often abandoned and destitute. If a woman contracts HIV during her time as a sex worker she will more than likely be evicted and be socially ostracised from her community. A woman reaching her earning potential as a sex worker may move into the position of exploiter and work as a madam earning money from other girls in the sex trade.

In addition to rescue, return and retirement, vocational training and alternative livelihood options are also an opportunity for exit of sex workers in the adhiya, contact, and flyer systems. Within Sonagachhi, the largest red light area in West Bengal, India, I have identified three businesses that provide vocational training and employment exclusively to women from the sex trade. These businesses comprise of women who make a choice to exit the sex trade and pursue an alternative livelihood. (Freeset 2016, Sari Bari 2016, & Love Calcutta Arts 2016).

3.5 Actions towards Rehabilitation and Reintegration of the Trafficked Person

Within India, there is much being done to support a trafficked person. India has two main laws that are aimed at supporting trafficked persons and prosecuting traffickers. These are the Immoral Traffic Prevention Act (1956) (ITPA) and the Protection of Children against Sexual Offences Act (2012) (POCSA). The ITPA is the main legislative tool to prevent and combat

sex trafficking. The main objective of the act is to stop the commercial exploitation of females throughout the country. However, the ITPA is rather narrow in scope and often trafficked females are penalised through imprisonment and fines for soliciting sex under the Act instead of the traffickers (Padney, Tewari, & Bhowmick 2013). According to Ghosh (2009 p720), the pattern is changing with the percentage of trafficked women being prosecuted reducing from 88% of total arrests under the ITPA in 1997 to 64% in 2006. Additionally, at the time of writing, there is a new law on the floor of the parliament that maybe passed which would become the new legislation for trafficking.

In 1998, the plan of action to combat trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation of women and children was introduced by the Department of Women and Child Development. This plan was the first to look at the holistic care of the trafficked person, introducing the need for rescue and shelter homes, as well as medical care, rehabilitation and reintegration into the labour market (NHRC 2010). The Indian government now places all rescued women and children in government or private aftercare homes where they receive medical care, counselling, family assessments, legal advocacy and a place to stay. The quality of these aftercare homes varies greatly due to the dependence on infrastructure; regular funding; and quality of shelter home staff. As a general rule NGO's that run aftercare homes offer greater holistic care to the trafficked person than government run homes as they have more funding and greater services.

In addition to the legal aspect, there is the Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee (DMSC) an Indian based sex workers' rights organisation. DMSC has three main principles; respect and dignity toward sex workers and sex work, reliance on the knowledge and wisdom of the community of sex workers, and recognition of sex work as an occupation (Cornish 2006). DMSC is staffed by sex workers and has representatives in all of the main red light areas within West Bengal. DMSC work on the ground to try and combat trafficking, they rely on their knowledge as sex workers to identify new trafficking cases as they enter and exert community power to remove them from brothel owners or pimps (Jana et al 2002). The difficulty with this model is that the DMSC work outside of the authority of the police and trafficked women who have been intercepted by DMSC are sent back home without support to ensure that they do not end up being re-trafficked. There are also concerns that members of DMSC are bribed by certain brothel owners to turn a blind eye to minor girls trafficked into the red light areas (Bandyopadhyay 2008).

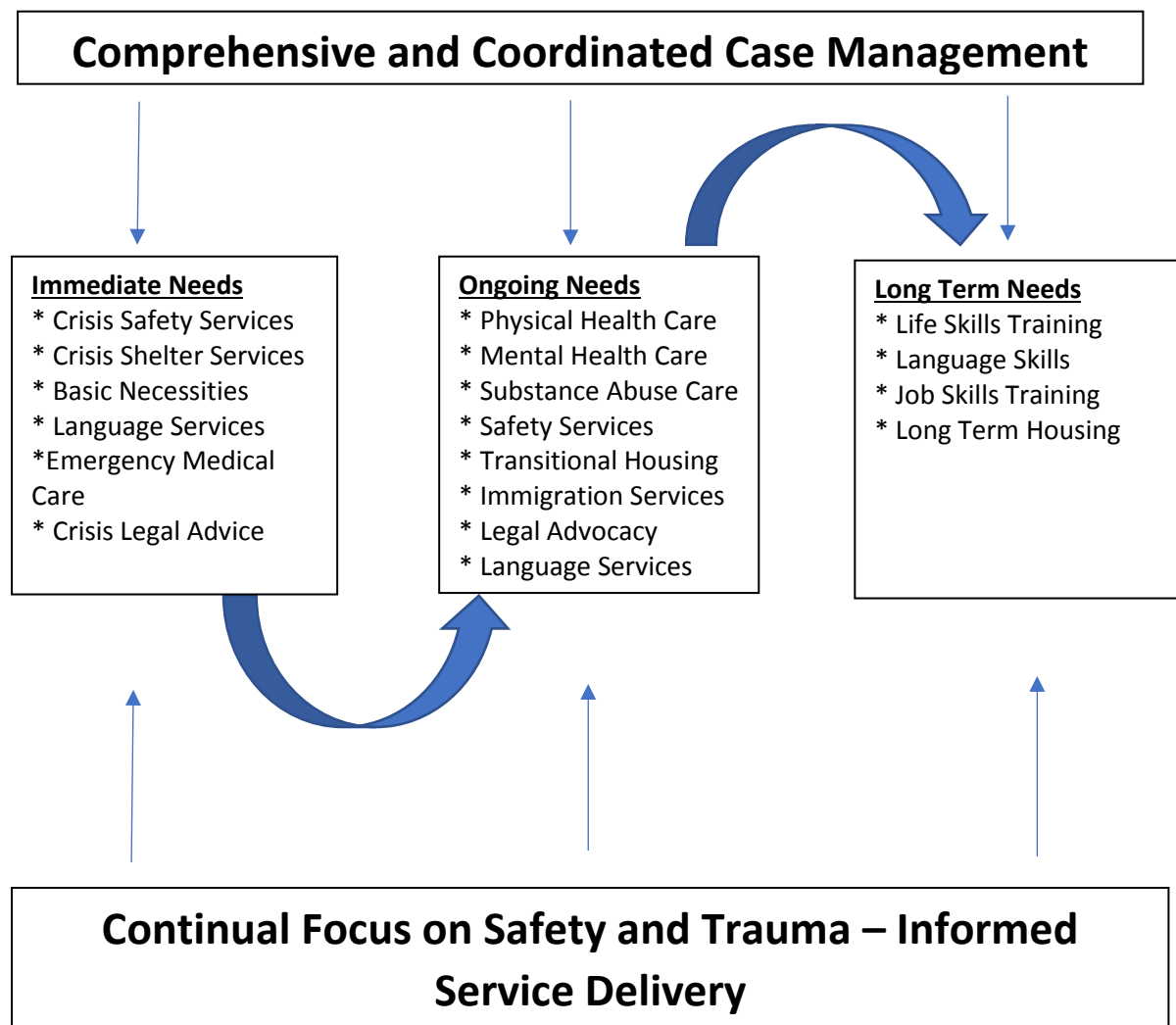
There are also organisations in India that are providing alternative livelihood options for women who have been trafficked into the sex trade. These organisations work as relational models, to provide an economic alternative to those women who no longer wish to work in the sex trade. An example of this is Freeset, which was mentioned in Chapter 1. Freeset is an Indian registered Private Limited Company which produces bags and T-shirts for export around the world; they hire only women who have a desire to leave the sex trade or women who are at risk of entering the sex trade. Tamar is a project of the Freeset Trust, which works alongside Freeset to provide holistic care to women who have exited the sex trade as well as working with those women who are still in the sex trade (Freeset Bags and Apparel 2014). Other businesses that follow this model are The Loyal Workshop (Loyal 2016), Sari Bari (Sari Bari 2016) and Love Calcutta Arts (LCA 2016). Together these businesses have provided alternative livelihood options to approximately 500 women⁴.

The rehabilitation needs of a trafficked person are complex and multifaceted. For optimum rehabilitation and reintegration into society, a holistic multi-disciplinary approach is needed (Tammala et al 2011). The trafficked person will often require support for a long period of time, and the needs will change with time. Many of the government shelter homes within India, provide the immediate support that is needed, but then due to lack of understanding, overwork, and reduced resources these shelter homes do not deliver any of the ongoing and long-term support that a trafficked person needs (Magar 2012). The lack of long term support leaves a trafficked person without the skills and support to reintegrate into society and can leave them vulnerable to being re-trafficked or voluntarily returning to the sex trade.

Figure 3.3 summarises the major areas of support that a trafficked person needs once removed from the exploitative situation. The support services are broken down into three areas; immediate needs, ongoing needs, and long-term needs. There are seven core service areas that are used to assist in rehabilitation and reintegration of a trafficked person into society; a) basic necessities; b) secure, safe shelter and housing; c) physical health care; d) mental health care; e) legal and immigration advocacy; f) job and life skills training; and g) substance abuse services (Macy & Johns 2011 p 95 & Hodge 2014). Though the trafficked person's needs will change over time these core services will help to dictate the kind of care that they receive.

⁴ 250 Women employed at Freeset Bags and Apparel, 55 women employed at Freeset Fabrics, 10 women employed at Freeset Dhulian, 130 women employed at Sari Bari, 70 women employed at Love Kolkata Arts, and 30 women employed at The Loyal Workshop.

Figure 3.3 Support Services Required for Women Exiting a Trafficking Situation



Source: Macy and Johns (2011, p90).

Service providers need to be responsive to changing needs and cultivate an expectation for a slow decrease in services provided as the trafficked person makes progress towards recovery, stability, and independence. The ultimate goal of service delivery agents towards a trafficked person is to create an environment of safety and security in which their innate resilience can be harnessed, and they can move from a place of oppression to a woman who has agency over her own life and decisions and becomes a flourishing member of society.

3.6 Conclusion

In conclusion, trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation is a global development issue. The vulnerabilities that lead to a person being trafficked are complex, multi-faceted,

and location specific. However, they usually comprise of economic poverty, socio-cultural norms that prioritise men over women, and high possibilities of migration. Within India and the context of West Bengal, the picture of sex trafficking is layered with physical confinement used in conjunction with psychological control to ensure the compliance of the trafficked individual. Over time the trafficked person regains some independence and decision-making ability. However, the psychological control exerted over time combined with social stigma makes them less likely to choose to leave the sex trade. There are actions that are being done to support a trafficked person, but these actions are often under-resourced and have elements of corruption within in them.

Chapter 4:

Methodology

4.1 Introduction

To understand how field-work was approached for this thesis, this chapter outlines the methodological approach undertaken, and the reasons for this. From the beginning of the research journey and throughout, the philosophical standpoint of the researcher and the way that the researcher views the world play a significant role in research design and implementation (Hesse-Biber & Leavy 2011). The process of research is cyclical in nature with thoughts and ideas being constantly reformed as more is understood. This chapter outlines the process that took place in order to achieve the research aim of exploring the exit strategies of women trafficked into the sex trade.

This chapter begins with an examination of the research methodology, briefly noting the constructivist and interpretivist philosophy that underpins this study. Narrative inquiry, and the methods used for this study are then explored, recognising how narrative inquiry as a methodology aligns with the philosophical standpoint of the research. An examination of the ethical issues involved in the study are then outlined. Section 4.3 specifically deals with the field-work, exploring participant selection, as well as how the selected research methods played out in practice, before examining challenges from the field-work experience. Finally, the analysis procedures and reliability of the findings are discussed to conclude this chapter.

4.2 Fieldwork Preparation

Development research brings with it many unique challenges around reliability and credibility of research findings given that it is often conducted in cultures and locations that are unfamiliar to the researcher (O’Leary 2014 & Scheyvens & Storey 2010). The theoretical background, research questions of the study and the challenges of development research impacted on the search for appropriate research methodologies and methods. The selected research methodology and research design as detailed below play an important role in the integrity of the research process (O’Leary 2014). This section begins with an explanation of the philosophical lens of the research, a key component of the methodology.

4.2.1 Philosophical Standpoint

The overarching research philosophy influencing this study is best described as constructivist and interpretivist, inferring that meaning is socially constructed by individuals through interaction with their world (Merriam 2002). Reality is not a fixed phenomenon, rather there are multiple interpretations of reality that change over time. An interpretivist approach to research seeks to understand how individuals experience and interact with their social world. Gaining insight into the experience of trafficked women who have successfully exited the sex trade was important to be able to answer the research question. For this reason, qualitative research methodology was employed for this study to produce rich data that is able to cover the complexity of the human experience (Richardson 1996). Qualitative research argues for the value of depth over quantity and works at delving into social complexities in order to explore and understand interactions, lived experiences and belief systems (O’Leary 2014). Through the research I wanted to understand what contributed to women’s exit experience including how they regain agency and journey towards empowerment. I also had a specific interest in how women understand freedom. This required depth, and recognition that freedom from the sex trade is complex and that there will be multiple contributing factors to a women’s experience of freedom. Working with qualitative methods provided the platform for gaining insight into the complexities of a women’s exit narrative. There are many data collection methods and approaches to qualitative research; this study uses narrative inquiry as an overarching methodological framework.

4.2.2 Narrative Inquiry Methodological Framework

Narrative inquiry is a way of understanding and inquiring into experience, it is situated in relationships and community and it attends to notions of expertise and knowing in relational and participatory ways (Clandinin 2016). Narrative inquiry is the study of stories or narratives, and infers that story is one of the fundamental units that account for human experience (Pinnegar & Daynes). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) describe narrative inquiry as a collaboration between researchers and participants that over time, through social interactions, seeks to understand experience. Narrative inquiry begins and ends with lived experiences, however the focus is not only an individuals lived experiences, but also an exploration of the social, cultural, familial, and institutional narratives within which the individual’s experiences have been shaped, expressed and enacted (Clandinin 2016).

Narrative inquiry finds itself on a number of understandings. First there is focus on local and specific rather than the general and universal. Understanding a particular experience, in a particular setting, involving a particular person or group of people is seen to be of significant value. Within narrative inquiry there is also a value placed on words. Words are seen to highlight the nuances of experience and relationship in any given setting. Third, narrative inquiry acknowledges the role of the researcher and the participants in the research process, noting that both parties will learn and change throughout the research process. Finally, narrative inquiry holds an acceptance of alternative epistemologies, noting that there are multiple ways to know and understand the world (Pinnegar & Dayes). This understanding of narrative inquiry fits well within the constructivist and interpretivist philosophy that underpins this study, as it provides a platform for stories to be shared, and then to examine the meaning of the story, as well as what the story means for the person sharing the story (Riley & Hawe).

This research focuses on situating narrative inquiry methodology within the context of Sonagacchi, Kolkata as described in Chapter 3. Conducting research in Kolkata as a New Zealand Pakeha meant that I was a researcher who was a cultural outsider. I have been living in Sonagacchi, Kolkata for the last seven years and am fluent in the local language (Bengali) which bridges some of the gaps in cultural understanding. The notion of insider/outsider researcher has long been present in social science research with some academics noting that outsider researchers may misinterpret or misrepresent because of their likely privileged positionality and lack of understanding (Rubin & Rubin 2011, Minkler 2004, & Wigginton & Setchell 2016). Acknowledging and managing possible effects from being an outsider is an important part of the research process, but it is also important to understand that not all research conducted by western researchers is inherently exploitative in nature (Scheyvens & Storey 2010). Using the narrative inquiry approach helps reduce potential problems as it acknowledges and respects other ways of knowing and being, this combined with my connection to the place, people and language of the research setting and a position of reflexivity assists in minimising misinterpretation and misrepresentation.

The theme of empowerment is a key component of this research, and attempts were made to place concepts of empowerment at the heart of each aspect of the research process. As a Western researcher conducting research among formerly trafficked women from West Bengal, power dynamics will be present, however as Scheyvens and McLennan (2014) comment, there are problems with the view of a simplistic binary that the researcher equates

to powerful outsider and researched equals powerless locals. The desire for the research process to negate issues of power, began with an invitation to the Freeset Women's Committee to co-create the research proposal. The Freeset Women's Committee is made up of formerly trafficked women who have successfully exited the sex trade and were selected to act as the voice of the wider Freeset community. Collaborating with the women's committee on the research design ensured that the research was something that the women wanted, and would be beneficial to the wider group of women that they represented.

An additional aspect of narrative inquiry that contributes significantly to the methodology of this study is the notion of collective stories. Collective stories are those that connect an individual's narrative to the broader story of a marginalised or oppressed social group (Chase 2011 & Richardson 1990). When marginalised people and groups are given the opportunity to tell their stories, this process can often lead to a demand for social change. In discussions with the women's committee about the research, it became clear that giving women an opportunity to tell their stories focusing on their strength and not victimhood was paramount. Women's stories connected to the broader story of the many women around the world who are trafficked into the sex trade, and show strength and resilience in the midst of exploitative environments.

4.2.3 Research Methods

Stories are a powerful representation of an individual's lived experience, and have been widely used in social science research (O'Leary 2014). For the purpose of this research life story narratives and semi-structured interviews were used as the methods for this study. Life story narratives, are concerned with people as active social agents and there is a sense that life story conveys the essence of this in meaningful ways (Willis 2013). Life story narratives facilitates research to be done in a way which does not oppress or exploit participants. The use of narrative and storytelling can also contribute to healing in women who have experienced trauma particularly in a culture with an oral tradition such as India (Lindahl 2012 & Colvin 2008). Using life story narratives among formerly trafficked women enabled them to determine what was significant to their life story and their exit narrative.

In addition to the life-story narratives, semi-structured interviews were used to promote discussion among social workers and community workers. Semi- structured interviews often begin with a well-defined plan, but provide flexibility during the interview process to take into account natural conversation flow, personalities, and allows the researcher to add or

detract questions depending on how the interview progresses (O’Leary 2014). The semi-structured interviews that I conducted provided flexibility to pursue new ideas and tangents that were not a part of the pre-planned questions. The flexibility opened possibilities for added depth and understanding that would not have been possible from other methods of data collection.

In both the life story narrative and the semi-structured interviews the posture was of listening. This was in order to create an environment of openness, safety and respect. It was planned that the life story narratives and the semi-structured interviews be digitally recorded if permission was given. Permission was granted by all participants and this enabled me as the researcher, to focus on being present and listening to the participant and provided a means to clarify what was stated in the interviews. In addition to listening, creating a sense of safety and respect for the participants involved a careful consideration for the ethical issues involved in the research.

4.2.4 Ethical Considerations

Researchers hold the responsibility for the welfare of research participants as well as the integrity of the research process. Ethical considerations for this study was governed by the methodological design and principles of the research, and through the formal university ethics approval process. The first stage of the university approval process was an assessment of the ethical issues involved in the research by completion of the Massey University “in house” ethics form. The second stage of the process was the submission of a full ethics application to the Massey University Human Ethics Committee which was approved (Appendix 1). As part of this process several ethical issues were assessed and ways to mitigate them were explored and were guided by the Massey University Code of Ethical Conduct for Research Teaching and Evaluations Involving Human Participants (MUHEC 2010). The full ethics application involved detailing procedures around gaining consent, conflict of roles, and the potential vulnerability of participants.

Gaining consent was done in two stages, the first stage was gaining consent from the Freeset Women’s Committee to conduct research within Freeset and with its employees. As stated, the women’s committee is made up of managers and women who have successfully exited the sex trade, together they approve all research conducted within Freeset. Additionally, as part of the first stage of consent permission was gained from local organisations that worked with women exiting the sex trade to approach social workers and community workers for

their participation in the research. The second stage of the consent process involved gaining individual informed and voluntary consent from each participant. Information sheets were provided in English and Bengali (Appendix 2 and 3), and were explained in Bengali for those participants who had low levels of literacy. Consent forms (Appendix 4) were completed for participants who had literacy levels to be able to comprehend and understand the form, the remainder of the participants gave oral consent in their native language.

As well as granting consent to conduct the research the Freeset Women's Committee also assisted in the recruitment of participants (the process of recruiting participants will be discussed in Section 4.3.2). There was a potential for a conflict of interest due to my role as the director of the Freeset Trust. The Trust works in red light communities to facilitate holistic freedom for those that wish to exit the sex trade. The Freeset Trust, partners with Freeset Bags and Apparel Limited (FBA) to provide employment opportunities to those who wish to exit the sex trade. The first group of participants were employees of FBA. The Women's committee's willingness to assist in the recruitment process helped to mitigate conflict of interest and any potential 'felt obligation' to participate in the research. The committee reinforced with participants that it was their choice to participate, and choosing not to participate, or withdrawing from the research at any time would not affect the services they receive from the Trust.

The ethics application, also detailed the potential vulnerability of participants who had been trafficked into the sex trade. Participants at the time of the research had all successfully exited the sex trade and were all receiving regular counselling. The participant's history as sex workers and trafficked persons create a potential for vulnerability. However, I was known and trusted by all the participants and my fluency in the local language (Bengali) and my understanding of the cultural context facilitated the research process and helped to ensure that risk to the participants was minimised.

4.3 Field Work

Field work took place over 6 weeks from the 16th of November 2016 through to the 28th of December 2016 in Sonagacchi, Kolkata. I had been living and working in Sonagacchi, Kolkata since February of 2010, so did not have a sense of physical entry into the field. Instead, I found myself making a conscious mental shift of viewing Sonagacchi, and the community of women I worked alongside as home, to that of research field. As an outsider, but also an insider I found this more difficult than expected. I had made the assumption, that

because the field was familiar to me, it would be easy to enter as a researcher and scholar. I had worked with members of the Freeset Women's Committee in the construction of the research proposal to ensure that the research was something that would benefit the community. However, between the time of the proposal and field work, personnel in Freeset management had changed, and I spent the first week of my field work renegotiating my consent to conduct research. The changed situation presented some challenges, as the new management had differing opinions on how the research should be conducted and what the focus of the research should be. I felt very conflicted in this space knowing that I had worked on the research proposal with the women's committee who are the representatives of formerly trafficked women exiting the sex trade, and wanted to remain true to what they have deemed to be of value. This particular issue was resolved through dialogue about the direction of the research, and the desires of the women's committee. Through this dialogue I was able keep the original focus and direction of the research. This experience highlighted to me the importance of remembering that my position was now one of researcher and accordingly I needed to ensure that I understood who the new stakeholders and gatekeepers were in the research process.

4.3.1 Participant Selection and Access

Prior to fieldwork the location of Sonagacchi and employees of Freeset Bags and Apparel had been chosen as the research site. This was due to the number of trafficked women who had successfully exited the sex trade, and the existing relationship that I had with the women which created the trust to enable the research to take place. The primary participants were women who had been trafficked, and had successfully exited the sex trade. Additionally, a number of key stakeholders were involved in the research, they consisted of social workers, community workers, and business managers who all worked with women who had been trafficked into the sex trade.

Primary participants were recruited through non-random sampling with assistance from the women's committee. Non-random sampling is commonly used in qualitative research where the importance is placed on depth and richness of data and representativeness is not the main goal (O'Leary 2014). The women's committee became gatekeepers for the research. The information about the research was explained to the committee who then disseminated the information to women they thought may be interested in participating. The names of individuals interested in participating in the research was then communicated to me by a

representative from the women's committee. I then approached these individuals giving them further information about the research and answering any questions they had about the research process.

Stake-holders which made up the second group of participants were also recruited through non-random sampling. Stake-holders were approached by contacting outside organisations who worked with trafficked women in the sex trade, and with those who had exited the sex trade. Outside organisations and stakeholders were already known to me through existing networks. Three organisations were approached, and two of these consented to stakeholders participating in the study. Once the organisations consented to the study, individual stakeholders from within the two organisations were approached directly about participating in the research. Through this selection process five previously trafficked women, and four stake holders participated in the study.

4.3.3 Field Work in Practice

Potential participants all worked within the Sonagacchi area, and were approached to participate in the research in person. All potential participants received an information sheet in the language of their choice (Bengali or English), for participants with minimal literacy the information sheet was read and explained orally. Potential participants were then given time to think over their wish to participate in the research. At the second meeting when potential participants got back to me, the main concepts in the information sheet were verbally explained and an opportunity for questions was given, this was again done in the language of their choice (Bengali or English). Consent was then obtained for their participation in the research, throughout this process one woman declined to participate in the research.

Once the invitation to participate in the research had been accepted, a time was made with each individual for their life story narrative. Interviews with primary participants were conducted in a private Tamar Trust office room, in walking distance from their place of work. These interviews always involved the sharing of cha (tea) and biscuits, which is custom in Bengali culture. At the start of the interview I restated my motivation for conducting the research, and received oral consent from non-literate participants and signed consent from literate participants a second time. Primary participants were then asked to select a pseudonym that would be used in the research. All interviews were audio recorded for clarity and to enable accurate transcribing of the interview.

When conducting life story narratives with primary participants the plan was to have two interviews, the first focusing on their life story and the second to focus on their exit narrative. During the first interview, it became clear that participants could not separate the two narratives, for them their exit narrative was woven into their life story narrative. The narratives were then modified to focus on the participant's whole life story during one interview. These interviews were often long (sometimes lasting up to 2 hours), but participants preferred to share their whole life story in one sitting. The fluency that I had in Bengali, and the existing relationship that I had with the women participating in the interview helped to facilitate the narratives. In all primary participant narrative interviews, I did not need to ask many questions, the women were natural story tellers and needed few prompts to share their stories.

In addition to spending time with participants during the interview, an unexpected but enjoyable aspect of the field work was a deepening of my relationship with the participants. Following the interviews, I accepted invitations to visit homes and family members. These meetings often culminated in me sharing my life story narrative with the participants and their family members. This shared storytelling, made a path for deeper relationship which continued after the field work was completed.

4.3.4 Field Work Challenges

Researching with women who had successfully exited a trafficking situation was immensely enjoyable because of the deepening of relationship that occurred, but despite this there were challenges in the field work process. The first challenge during field work, was the effect that the narratives had on me personally. Due to my existing relationship with the primary participants, I had heard parts of the women's life story narratives prior to conducting field-work. I had assumed that because I knew parts of their story that the field-work would not affect me, however many women in the course of the life story interviews shared parts of their story that they had never shared with anyone else before. At times, this became emotionally difficult to carry as the women shared stories of rape, abuse, and suicide attempts. The schedule of interviewing and transcribing while maintaining my full-time job became draining and I found myself becoming emotionally exhausted. Following the completion of field-work I was able to take some time out to process the narratives and regain emotional energy for the remainder of the research process. In order to deal with the emotional challenges of the research process, I debriefed some of the stories I found difficult

with my clinical supervisor. The intensity of the life story narratives highlighted to me the importance of giving these women a platform from which their stories could be told.

An additional challenge during field-work was managing the dual role of researcher and Trust Director. This duality of roles was identified as a potential issue during my ethics application (see section 4.2.4) and I constantly worked to separate the roles while conducting field-work. The difficulty arose during recruitment and interviewing of primary participants who due to existing relationships with me struggled to differentiate the roles I carried. An example of this was during the first life-story interview when during the consent process the participant commented that I did not need her consent as she trusted me and knew that I would “do the right thing”. The difficulty for primary participants to differentiate the roles I carried was also apparent when three out of five of the primary participants stopped mid-way through a portion of their life story narrative to comment that “I don’t need to say this you already know this about me”. After reassuring the participants that I wanted them to share even if they thought that I knew the information already, the interviews progressed without interruption. This highlighted the importance of trust in the researcher / researched relationship. When the trust level is high, great trust is given to the researcher to accurately and honestly portray the essence of narratives.

The third and final challenge during field-work consisted of identifying appropriate times to interview stake-holders. All stakeholders indicated an excitement about the research and expressed a strong desire to participate in the research, but were exceptionally busy and this made it difficult to find a time when stake-holders were available to participate. All stakeholders indicated that it would be impossible to conduct the interview during work hours, because the demands on their time during the work day was too high. After much negotiation times were eventually found that suited each stake-holder participant, these times were often in the evenings and on weekends. Participants were often tired throughout the interview and this affected the interviews in some cases, with participants struggling to conceptualise or explain ideas at various points. Reflecting on this challenge, I would in future give more notice about field-work dates to stake-holders, so that interviews could be scheduled at times that suited the participants, but did not leave them exhausted.

4.3.5 Exiting the Field and Feedback Procedures

In terms of feedback procedures, transcriptions were completed following each narrative interview. Transcribing was time consuming but solidified each narrative and enabled not just

the words to be transcribed, but also the emotion and body language as elements of a women's narrative were being told. Primary participant interviews were conducted in Bengali and transcribed directly into English, where there was no suitable English translation for what was being articulated the Bengali word was used. Following transcription of the interviews, I met with the participants to review the transcription to ensure that they were happy with everything that was recorded. In the case of primary participants, reviewing transcriptions ensured that my translation was accurate. Accuracy of translation for the interviews with stake-holders was not an issue as these interviews were all conducted in English

At the conclusion of the field-work period I returned to New Zealand. Although I would be returning to Kolkata at a later date as part of my work commitments, this provided a great opportunity to mark the end of the interviews with the participants. In the week before my departure, I shared a meal with every participant. This time was used by the participants to talk about themes of the research and retell parts of their life story, as I too shared parts of my story. Once the thesis has been completed a summary of the key findings and recommendations will be given to all organisations that participated in the research. For participants who requested it, a link to electronically access the full thesis will be given. When I return to Kolkata, I will share orally with primary participants the key findings and recommendations of the research.

4.4 Data Processing and Reliability

There are various ways to approach the analysis of qualitative data. Allowing for the underpinning methodology of narrative inquiry my analytical strategy needed to echo the deep and rich meaning from the research process (Willis 2013). There are different frameworks for a narrative analysis and for this study I loosely used Riessman's (2008) thematic analysis of narratives as the framework for analysis. The analysis began with data immersion, of which the first step was transcription. Transcriptions were done in full, and also noted non-verbal material, such as emotion (crying, laughter), pauses, and gestures. Although this process was time consuming, it was a crucial first step in familiarising myself with the data and a key point when initial insights into the data were developed (Willis 2013). The second phase of data immersion was the reading and rereading of the transcripts. Boulton and Hammersley (2006) state that a close reading of the data, with a view to identify aspects that may be significant is an essential first step in analysis. With this in mind, I spent several days reading the transcripts highlighting and noting what appeared to be significant. This

phase of the analysis highlighted some commonalities in the narrative stories and provided ideas on how the data could be constructed.

Data coding was influenced by the thematic analysis framework, which implies that the research is concerned to identify themes that emerge from within the data through an inductive approach (Willis 2013). Initial coding was completed by using summary words or phrases that had presented themselves in the in depth reading phase of analysis. The research questions became a guide to categorise the themes ensuring that emerging themes were relevant to the research questions. As the inductive coding phase continued, concepts of empowerment, agency and freedom emerged and were clarified throughout the process, demonstrating that thematic analysis is often a cyclical process in which themes are constantly defined and redefined (Braun & Clarke 2006). At this stage, it became important to refer back to the original transcripts to ensure that the codes and categories identified remained true to the overall narrative that was told (Willis 2013). There was a tension between recognising themes and concepts within the data whilst giving voice to the whole of a women's narrative. For this reason, a summary of each of the primary participant's narrative can be found in Appendix 5, and multiple direct quotes were used throughout the results chapter.

Producing reliable results is important for all research, in this study ensuring that the findings were helpful and honoured the women who shared their life stories was imperative. There are many ways to assess the reliability and validity of qualitative research, for the purposes of this thesis an adaptation of Boulton and Hammersley (2006) and O'Leary's (2014) frameworks will be used. This framework involves three components; reflexivity, methodological consistency and authenticity of the findings.

The concept of reflexivity is a crucial part of the research process. Boulton and Hammersley (2006) explained that the researcher should be constantly thinking about her role in the research process and the implications that this has on the analysis of the data. Acknowledging subjectivity, positionality and potential biases was the first step in the process of reflexivity for this study. Detailing how research would be conducted in an ethical manner in light of positionality was mentioned in section 4.2.4. In addition to this the principals of the research design and process were explained within the framework of a narrative inquiry methodology.

With regard to methodological consistency, it is important that the research design and methodology is well thought out prior to the collection of data (O'Leary 2014). A robust, and well documented research process can assist in the dependability of the findings (Murray &

Overton 2014). The research design for this study was well thought out with an inclusive approach that enabled formerly trafficked women to contribute to the design of the research. In this chapter I have outlined the methodological framework used in this study and its link to the data collection methods and analytical strategy. In addition, I have also explained how the research played out in practice and the importance of transparency and research ethics.

Assessing the authenticity of the findings is the final component of the framework to assess the reliability of the research. Qualitative research and in particular narrative inquiry has a primary aim to understand the meaning that people attach to events within their life story, and has less concern about whether the narratives are an accurate reflection of actual events (Plokinghorne 2007 & Chase 2011). To ensure authenticity in the research concepts of triangulation can be used. Triangulation, infers that the researcher is bringing more than one method to bear in the same context (Boulton & Hammersley 2006). In this study triangulation was used through the addition of semi-structured interviews with key stake-holders who had experience working alongside trafficked women in Kolkata. In addition to triangulation, constant referral back to the transcripts throughout the research process ensured that the findings accurately reflected the feel of the narratives.

4.5 Chapter Summary

In conclusion, this chapter has outlined the methodological approach used within this study, including field-work experiences and data analysis techniques. The philosophical underpinnings of constructivism and interpretivism which hold that meaning is socially constructed by individuals through interaction with their world, alongside the research aim and questions guided the methodological approach that supported this study. The narrative inquiry method provided the platform from which field-work could begin. The field-work in Sonagacchi was a place in which I became the learner and was gifted by the participants with life-story narratives that form the basis of the research findings as well as impacted me personally. The chapter concluded by explaining the techniques used to analyse the data, and an explanation of the reliability of the findings. The following chapter details what was shared by participants and begins to detail results of the research questions.

Chapter 5:

Exit Strategies of Women Trafficked into the Sonagacchi Sex Trade

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the fieldwork with the aim of understanding the freedom experiences of women trafficked into the sex trade. The research was guided by a narrative methodological framework as outlined in Chapter 4 and informed by an understanding of women's empowerment and agency as discussed in Chapter 2, and by an understanding of the landscape of sex trafficking within West Bengal, India as outlined in Chapter 3. This chapter describes the specific findings of the research with the aim of meeting the research aim and objectives as outlined in Chapter 1. The findings discussed in this chapter are divided into four sections. The first section begins by outlining the key strategies that women employed to facilitate their successful exit from the sex trade. Secondly the hindrances that women identified as creating a barrier towards successful exit are also discussed. The third section discusses how participants shifted power imbalances to become empowered, as well as examining how agency became 'thickened' throughout their trafficking narrative. Finally, the fourth section discusses how trafficked women experienced freedom. This section determined that freedom was not equated with exit, and empowerment although these were significant aspects of a women's freedom experience.

5.2 Key factors that facilitated successful exit

As women shared their life stories, they could identify what helped them to successfully exit the sex trade, and five themes emerged. The first theme was also identified as a hindrance by some of the women, and that is a romantic relationship. Secondly, was the prospect of an alternative livelihood option. Self – belief or a personal resilience that motivated them to push for an alternative from the sex trade was also identified. Next was the presence of a person that supported and encouraged their decision to exit the sex trade. Finally, the notion of shared experience and the community of women who were all in the sex trade and had themselves been trafficked was identified as a help toward successful exit.

Romantic Relationships

Romantic relationships were identified by the participants as a means to facilitate women to exit the sex trade. For example, Mini's⁵ experience was atypical to most women who are trafficked into the sex trade. She was rescued from her brothel fifteen days after she was trafficked by a local pimp who wanted to develop a relationship with her, following her rescue she went on to marry him. His positionality in the community as a pimp and local gang leader afforded her protection, and as a direct result of this relationship she no longer had to work in the sex trade. Mini reflects on her husband's role in helping her exit the sex trade,

I often think, what would my life be like if he had not rescued me from the sex trade? I think I would have had a hard life in the sex trade and would probably be a madam exploiting other girls.

Mini feels that without her husband rescuing her from the brothel she would not have been able to exit the sex trade. In a similar context, Joya⁶ also found that her relationship with her husband was a catalyst to her exiting the sex trade.

The main reason I wanted to leave the sex trade was for my husband. He is from a good family and they did not know that I was in the sex trade, they [his family] still don't know that I was in the trade..... He always encouraged me to leave the sex trade, he told me that I was good, and he showed me that I was good. He showed me what actual love is.

The encouragement and support of Joya's husband was the motivation that she needed to push through the struggles and difficulties and successfully exit the sex trade.

Alternative Livelihood Option

Another key factor that trafficked women identified as a helpful for their exit from the sex trade was having an alternative livelihood option that was catered to their specific needs. All but one of the women who participated in the research identified that having a company like Freeset that was only for women in a similar situation to themselves was a key component to their successful exit, with many commenting that without the alternative livelihood option that Freeset provided, they would most likely still be in the sex trade. The presence of

⁵ See Appendix 5 for a full summary of Mini's life story narrative.

⁶ See Appendix 5 for a full summary of Joya's life story narrative.

community, shared experience and reduced stigma that came from working in an environment where all women had spent time in the sex trade was significant for women and will be discussed in more depth in Chapter 6. Joya remembers not knowing what Freeset would be like, but reflected

If I made a mistake in training nobody told me off, everyone just supported and encouraged me. Now I have a family, Freeset is like a family to me.

Sukuntula⁷ was a founding staff member of Freeset, for Sukuntula, the option of a business like Freeset was what enabled her to exit the sex trade after many years of trying. Like Sukuntula, Priya⁸ found that having the option of coming to a workplace like Freeset, was what enabled her to leave the trade:

When I first started at Freeset I had a lot of worries and tension The people at Freeset encouraged me to share what was going on and always stood beside me. They helped me believe that I could do it I always thought a lot about what work I could do outside of sex work But nobody ever gave me a chance, Freeset was the only place to give me a chance, and now that I have been given that chance I no longer work in the sex trade.

What women identified was not just the need for an alternative source of income, but also that the work environment provided support services that catered to the unique needs of women who have been trafficked into the sex trade.

Self-Belief and Personal Resilience

Self-belief, or a sense of personal resilience was also a strong theme that emerged from the research. Women noted that this was an important factor towards their successful exit, many also commented that this is why some of their friends who are still in the sex trade have not been able to exit. Priya has only been out of the sex trade for 18months, and she encourages women who she used to work alongside in the sex trade to believe they can exit the trade if they want it. She states:

⁷ See Appendix 5 for a full summary of Sukuntula's life story narrative.

⁸ See Appendix 5 for a full summary of Priya's life story narrative.

I will encourage them that if I can do it so can they, if they try they will be able to do it..... I am talking now with one of my friends and I think she will come too. She still doesn't think she can do it, but I know she can.

The importance of self – belief is closely linked with making the decision to exit. Runu⁹ had made an unsuccessful initial exit but it was exposure to an alternative livelihood option that gave her self-belief and contributed to her resilience that she identifies as the catalyst to her leaving successfully. She reflects that her time at another Freedom business helped her realise that she had options to leave, and had the inner strength to leave the trade. When Runu met with a Freeset community worker this self-belief and inner strength gave her the courage to answer yes when the community worker asked if she wanted to exit the trade. Sukuntula also noted that she had a strong self-belief that if she was given the opportunity to work somewhere else, she would leave the trade and be successful. She recalled her husband challenging her ability to manage a “good” job, and the moment where she stood up to him and said, “No if I get an opportunity to do good work, then I can do it”. Developing this sense of self-belief and resilience is essential to women successfully exiting a trafficking situation.

Support Person

Having a support person / people was also identified as a factor that helped women to successfully exit the sex trade. For Runu, this person was a neighbour who worked at another Freedom business in the area. This neighbour encouraged Runu to exit the sex trade and introduced her to an alternative livelihood option, even though this particular time the exit was unsuccessful, Runu identifies that the support from this neighbour was what introduced her to the possibility that sex work wasn't the only option for her future. For Sukuntula her support person was the founder of Freeset, as a founding staff member of Freeset she had time to get to know him. She recalls:

when I first left the trade he (the founder) told me that if I had any problems, he would support me ... I never needed any help, but it was important for me to know that if I ever needed it I would have help and support ... That gave me a lot of confidence and support and joy that someone cared enough to support me.

Joya's support person was her husband; she reflected that he would encourage her to leave the sex trade and was able to show her that she was a good person despite what had happened

⁹ See Appendix 5 for a full summary of Runu's life story narrative.

to her. When she received her first wage from Freeset and stopped working in the sex trade, she returned home and celebrated with her husband. These support people helped to encourage women to exit the sex trade, and became the safety net for the women if anything were to go wrong or prove difficult. Without the perceived support and safety net, women may not have taken the risk of attempting to exit the sex trade.

Shared Experience

Shared experience and community of women in a similar situation was also identified as a factor that aided trafficked women to successfully exit the sex trade. All the participants started Freeset in a training group that had up to nine other women all wishing to exit the sex trade. The training period lasts for three months and it is during that time that women transition out of sex work. The group environment was identified as a major support to the women, alongside the wider community of Freeset women who had already graduated the training program. Runu comments that it was the group of women that she started with that really helped to leave the trade,

Having five of us start together was a really big help for me, they helped me to leave the sex trade really. Once one of us decided to stay at Freeset and leave the sex trade, we all did. When one of us struggled, we all struggled but we were together.

This solidarity and shared experience was crucial in Runu managing the initial struggles as she attempted to exit the sex trade. For Joya, there was one woman at Freeset who supported her, she says

I thank God for that woman she has given me so much help, she took care of me like I was her own daughter That is what I love about Freeset, this place is family If any women who are in the trade come here they will find family too.

The concept of shared experience and solidarity is a powerful force that can provide encouragement and support to women, particularly as they transition out of the sex trade, and navigate all the difficulties that come with leaving the sex trade.

Women who participated in this study were able to articulate both practical and more general factors that helped facilitate their successful exit from the sex trade. Factors such as a support person, shared experience and self-belief contributed to empowerment processes which will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter. Practical factors such as an alternative livelihood option provided the means for exit and complemented factors that

contributed towards empowerment processes. Aside from these strategies that helped facilitate women's exit from the sex trade, there were also hindrances to their exit which is discussed in the following section.

5.3 Hindrances to Exit

As women shared their life stories, they could very clearly articulate what hindered their successful exit from the sex trade. Across the five life story narratives, there were five clear themes that emerged as hindrances to a trafficked woman being able to successfully exit the sex trade: debt, pressure from madam's, obligations to family, lack of viable alternative livelihood options, and exploitative romantic relationships were the five themes that emerged, these will be discussed in detail below.

Debt

Debt was noted by three of the women as a barrier to exiting the sex trade. Initially it was the price that the women were sold for that became their debt. In the experience of many trafficked women, the costs involved in the trafficking (purchase price, clothes, transportation, bribes) are borne by the women in the form of debt bondage, once they arrive at their destination they are told that they now need to service customers to pay off their debt (Hodge & Lietz 2007 p167 & Aghatise 2004 p1130). For many women, this is the first time that they become aware that they are in a form of bondage, and are unable to leave until this debt is cleared, this process can take many years. Runu one of the participants in the research commented about her experience.

The money that my madam bought me for, that became my debt and I had to pay her back I came in on an Adihya system. For example, if a customer gives 100RPS then I get 50 and the madam gets 50, but from my 50 I must pay the debt that I owe plus my food and anything else that I need. So, I never actually got any money, it all went to paying the debt It took my 3 years before I paid off my debt and was able to earn some money for myself.

Priya had a similar experience recalling an incident with her madam three years after she was sold into the sex trade,

Then I had the big fight with my madam and I found out that she had bought me and I had been sold. She told me that I owed her money for what she paid for me and the

cost of keeping me. She told me that I would have to work with her for 1 more year to clear the debt that I owed her.

For both Priya and Runu debt was the major factor that kept them in the sex trade after they were first trafficked. Both came from very poor families and had no means to pay the debt except to work as a sex worker. Matthews (2014 p55) agrees, stating that debt is one of the main reasons why some women felt they could not leave sex work, however many sex workers feel that continuing to work in the sex trade is the fastest way to repay their debts. This can lead to a vicious cycle of sex work and debt with women find difficult to extract themselves from.

In many cases the debt that a trafficked woman holds is not formally documented, which allows the madam to exploit the woman and gain maximum financial benefit from each woman. Joya recalls the interaction with her madam when she attempted to leave the sex trade:

When I tried to leave the sex trade my madam said to me you have to give me 50,000RPS (approx. \$1070NZD) to leave, but I did not know where would I get that from. So, what I did is, I took all my jewellery anything that I had I took it off and pawned it my focus was just to pay of this 50,000RPS so I could leave.

Joya was sold by her Uncle for 5000RPS, after five years of working for her madam without receiving any of her own income. For those five years Joya was seeing approximately five to seven customers per day, with each customer paying between 200RPS – 500RPS to Joya's madam, despite this her debt had become 50,000RPS. As discussed in Chapter 3, Madams will often exploit the fact that many women who have been trafficked have little to no education, and therefore do not understand simple maths (Hodge & Lietz 2007 p 168). The madam also deals with customers directly, setting the price and collecting the money; this means that the sex worker never has a true understanding of how much money she is bringing in for her madam. The economic exploitation that Joya experienced at the hands of her madam can be more clearly seen in the following chart. Over the course of five years, Joya's madam profited 175,000RPS from Joya's sex work, despite this Joya was told that she had incurred a debt of 50,000RPS.

Figure 5.1 Income Joya made for her madam during her first 5 years in the sex trade.

Purchase Price	5000RPS (\$106NZD)
Low estimate of payment by each customer	300RPS (\$6.40NZD)
Average number of customers per day	5
Amount per day	1500RPS (\$32NZD)
Days per week	6
Total income per week	9000RPS (\$192NZD)
Total income per month	36,000RPS (\$770NZD)
Total income over five years	180,000RPS (\$3848NZD)

Social workers who work with women who have been trafficked into the sex trade also identified debt as a hindrance to women successfully exiting. Women trafficked into the sex trade come from poor families, and often become the financial providers for their family members. Priya, through her sex work paid for her mother to have an operation. When women need a lump sum of money to help with family needs, or their own health needs they will first approach their madam. The madam will usually agree to lend them money, this is then added to debt from their purchase price further trapping them into the sex trade. From my personal experience and participants in the study, interest rates are usually 10 -20% per month, this means that if a woman owes her madam 30,000RPS, then she will need to repay her madam between 3,000 – 6,000RPS per month. If a woman is not yet earning money from her sex work, or cannot pay the interest then the interest would be added to the principal debt. In this way madam's can escalate debt to the point where it becomes impossible to pay off, and the woman is trapped under the control of her madam as a direct result of her debt (Reid 2016 p501).

Pressure from Madams

The second major theme that emerged from the narrative interviews was the pressure that women received from their madams. Women who have been sold into the sex trade will often face extreme pressure from their madams to service customers. Priya reflects about the pressure that was placed on her by the madam, and the difference when she moved from an Adihya system to an independent sex worker,

When I was with my madam if I was unwell or tired or if I didn't want to go with a customer I was forced too, with my own room I was in charge so I could say no if I wanted to. My madam was very bad, I had four forced abortions from her. I wanted to keep a baby, but she wouldn't allow me.

Trafficked women face the most pressure from madams when they are under Chukri and Adihya systems because the number of customers that they see directly impacts the madam's income level. It is also during this time that the madam is trying to assert to control and psychologically entrap a trafficked woman so that she feels disempowered and unable to enact any agency over her situation.

Runu reflects that her first exit attempt was unsuccessful because she was on an Adihya system with her madam. The Adihya system allowed her the opportunity to liaise with her madam to leave the brothel during the day to attend training for her new job. The red-light area is busiest after 5pm so madams will sometimes allow women to leave the brothel outside of these hours as long as she returns to service customers in the evenings. Not all women working under an Adihya system would be able to spend long periods of time away from the brothel as Runu was able to. She was spending 9 hours a day training for a new job, and when she returned to her brothel she was tired and did not want to service customers. The madam forced her to work in the sex trade every night when she returned home from training, and began to harass her that she was not bringing in enough income any longer. Runu was pressured into leaving her job and return to sex work full time to continue to have a place to live. When she did successfully exit the sex trade she had her own room and therefore did not have the pressure of a madam to hinder her exit,

The brothel that I was working in one of the girls there worked at one of the freedom businesses she is the one that suggested I leave the trade and work for the same business. She took me there and I worked for a little while I had real problems with my madam then because I was on an Adihya system, so when I was working I didn't earn any money for her.

The pressure from madams takes different forms, with some madam's like in the case of Runu and Priya directly hindering the trafficked women's desire to exit the trade. In other scenarios, it can be more indirect, with madams using emotional manipulation, violence, and addiction to hinder a woman's ability to exit the sex trade. In Mini's narrative interview, she recalls being drugged by her madam to initiate her into the sex trade. This left her unable to

walk, talk, or even see properly. The following day Mini told her madam that she wanted to leave and return home. However, the after effects of the drugs, along with the rough sex that she had experienced left her physically unable to leave or travel the long distance back home. Mini's madam continued to use a mixture of drugs and alcohol to ensure Mini's compliance with customers. This is a common experience shared by many of the women who participated in the research. The women experienced physical, sexual and emotional abuse in excessive levels during the first few weeks and months of their time in the sex trade, this was reduced as women demonstrated themselves to be compliant, and accepting of their fate as sex workers.

Family and Societal Obligations

Alongside the pressure that trafficked women received from their madams, family and societal obligations were also identified as a hindering factor to successful exit from the sex trade. India is a collective society, and this leads many women to choose personal sacrifice if the sacrifice will result in the betterment of the wider family, even if their sacrifice goes against their own personal desire to exit the sex trade (Rushing 2006 p478). When Priya could return to her mother for the first time after being trafficked, she told her mother all that had happened to her;

I told her everything, even that I had no money to show for it. She said to me, 'look you are already in the trade now, don't fight it any more, just accept it this way at least you can get some income'. No-one was there to support me from my family so I had no-choice but to accept it. So, I went back to Sonagacchi and tried to make the best of the situation.

Priya had a strong desire to exit the sex trade, and had fought her madam to be able to return to her mother, but the obligation to follow what her mother suggested, even though it went against her personal wishes was strong. Priya returned to the sex trade and sent money back to the village to support her mother until she passed away. Once Priya's mother passed away Priya began to save her money to create better conditions for herself within the sex trade. In the case of Sukuntula, it was a combination of family and societal obligations that hindered her from exiting the sex trade. A short time after Sukuntula was initiated into the sex trade, she went to people from her village and told them what had happened to her. Sukuntula stated

I felt so much shame, what would I tell my father ... they convinced me to stay, saying that my father could not keep me in the house any longer. They told me I

should stay and try to help my family. I didn't feel bad when I heard them say that, they were right.

Sukuntula felt the societal obligations of not being a burden on her father following the failure of her marriage, that combined with the shame of being in the sex trade and what others from her village were saying to her meant that Sukuntula remained in the sex trade, even though she did not want to be there and did not enjoy it at all.

Social Workers I interviewed agreed that social pressures and obligations to family members can be hindrances to women being able to successfully exit the sex trade. One Social worker commented that when women choose to exit the sex trade they often end up letting down their families who have come to depend on the extra income that the women have been contributing. The pressure that comes from society to take care of your family, and the family pressure emphasising the need for additional income can see women struggle to exit the sex trade despite a personal desire to exit. Women can find themselves in a position where they must choose between an ongoing relationship with their families and their own freedom from the sex trade. Another social worker echoed these thoughts stating that for many women who have successfully exited the sex trade, they went through a process whether consciously or subconsciously of counting the cost. Getting out of the sex trade cost them a lot, they may lose friendships, family, and possessions, they count the cost and decide that their freedom is worth losing all those things.

Lack of alternative livelihood options

Another factor that hinders women from successfully exiting the sex trade is finding an alternative livelihood option. Many women who are trafficked into the sex trade have low levels of education, this combined with the stigma from the sex trade result in trafficked women struggling to find alternative work that is financially sustainable (Binagwaho et al 2010 p94). Social worker one, noted that women who have been trafficked into the sex trade find transitioning into a structured work day difficult,

The women go from being in an unstructured environment where they see customers as needed to an environment where they need to turn up on time, work a full 8hour day, follow company rules. They need a company that is willing to walk alongside each woman patiently as she transitions into her new work environment.

Most work environments would not provide the support and patience required to support trafficked women into alternative livelihood options, specialist ‘Freedom businesses’ appear to be a model that can provide this.

Joya commented that she searched many places for alternative work, but that no places would offer her work because she had no formal identification which is necessary in India when applying to work. When a woman is trafficked, she does not bring her identification documents with her, and once in the red-light environment it becomes difficult to return home to collect identification, or to apply for new identification. If a woman is trafficked across borders, then it becomes even more difficult to find alternative livelihood options, because under immigration law they are illegal immigrants and do not have the right to work in India. Runu also noted that alternative livelihood options for women trafficked into the sex trade are minimal, she reflected:

Outside of this factory (Freeset), there is no other place for me to work. If I didn’t get work here then I would still be in the sex trade now, how would I leave if I didn’t have any other way to make money.

All the research participants commented that having a business that was just for women who exited the sex trade was essential in giving them the support that they needed to exit the sex trade.

Associated with the lack of alternative livelihood options was the loss of income that women faced. While in the sex trade, women under an Adiya system are supported by their madams. The madam provides the accommodation and food, women who wish to exit the sex trade from this system need to find alternative accommodation and take over all financial responsibilities all at once. This can be a very difficult transition as it may be the first time in their lives where they have had to manage finances on their own, they are also transitioning from having daily income to having a monthly wage. Runu stated that when she first started at Freeset she struggled financially

During training time, I had to take customers after work because I didn’t have enough money. There were five of us that started together.... We were talking and saying, maybe we will quit, we aren’t earning enough money to support ourselves, it is so hard... during that time the five of us supported each other to stay ... in that way we all left the sex trade.

Runu found it very difficult to leave the sex trade from a financial perspective, and it was not until she was a permanent employee and on a higher wage that she was successfully able to exit. It is essential that organisations wishing to provide alternative livelihood options provide a sustainable living wage, and financial literacy education to ensure the successful exit of trafficked women from the sex trade.

Exploitative romantic relationships

Romantic relationships, as well as in some cases facilitating exit, were also identified as exploitative and as a result became a hindrance to successful exit from the sex trade. Women who are trafficked into the sex trade, will often see men as a potential means of escape from the sex trade, unfortunately sometimes these men further exploit the women hoping for some financial gain from the relationship. Half of the participants in the research had a romantic relationship that hindered them from exiting the sex trade. Sukuntula developed a relationship with one of her customers, and after some time he offered for her to stay with him and no longer work in the sex trade.

He told me, ‘you stay here, there is no more need for you to go and work in the sex trade’. I thought to myself, it is his own house, it will be good, I will be able to have a good life. After I had been there (at his house) for a few weeks I started to think that I would go, he was keeping me as a ‘কান্ধি মেয়ে (kanki meye)¹⁰’ He sent me all over India for sex work, and I was always scared..... After I had been with him for about two years I decided to return to Sonagacchi.

Sukuntula’s romantic relationship placed her in a position where she became more exploited and more isolated. She had hoped that the relationship would assist her in exiting the sex trade, however this was not the case. This experience for Sukuntula decreased her trust in the possibility of romantic relationships to assist her in exiting the sex trade, and she remained in the sex trade despite offers of her present husband to support her until she received a job at Freeset and was able to financially support herself. In the case of Priya, her romantic relationship initially helped her to exit the sex trade, however as the relationship ended she was forced back into the sex trade to support herself.

¹⁰ কান্ধি মেয়ে Kanki meye – is roughly translated to the English word whore. However, it also carries connotations of worthlessness, dirtiness, and a dehumanisation.

He stayed with me for a year, and I didn't need to work in the sex trade. Then he left to return to his village, but he would send money, sometimes 5000INR per month, sometimes 2000INR, but it was enough. Then after another 18 months he stopped sending money altogether. So again, I had to start taking customers.

The failure of the relationship meant a failed attempt to exit the sex trade, however in some cases the relationship lasts and can be a help to a trafficked woman trying to exit the sex trade.

Similarly to factors that helped women successfully exit the sex trade, hindrances consisted of both practical difficulties as well as hindrances that impacted on women's empowerment processes. The lack of alternative livelihood options available for women who have been trafficked into the sex trade was an obvious hindrance that women expressed. Other hindrances such as debt, pressure from madams, societal and family obligations impacted on a woman's ability to overturn power structures and engage in empowerment processes negatively affecting her ability to exit the sex trade. Despite women identifying factors that both hindered and helped their exit from the sex trade, women identified that exit in and of itself did not equate to freedom. To determine women's experiences of freedom experiences of empowerment and agency were explored.

5.4 Empowerment and agency in the exit narrative

Women trafficked into the sex trade, find themselves in an exploitative environment, where the power over their life is in the hands of the trafficker and the madam. Women shared about this dynamic in their narrative life stories. What was interesting to note, is that in the confines of disempowerment trafficked women were still able to enact agency within the limitations of the choices available to them, reflecting Klocker's (2007) description of 'thinned agency' as described in Chapter 2. The choices that women were able to make for themselves, and how power dynamics shifted throughout each women's life will be discussed. Following this I will explain how women became more empowered, and the role that this had in their ability to exit the sex trade.

Discourse on trafficking and power often portray women who were trafficked into the sex trade as having power prior to their trafficking experience, power being taken away at the time of trafficking, and then regained on exit. This research would disagree with that view. The power dynamics are much more complex and nuanced than power held, power lost, and power regained narrative. In all the participants' narratives, it was clear that prior to their

trafficking experience they did not hold power over their own lives, and had little agency or decision-making ability. It became clear to Runu that she did not have power over her own life when her brother stopped her from marrying the man that she had chosen for herself, she states;

There was one boy from my village and I wanted to marry him, if I had married him, I would not have ended up in the sex trade. My oldest brother did not agree with my desire to have a love marriage, so I was not allowed to marry him.

The power over Runu's future was in her parent's and brother's hands, who arranged a suitable marriage for Runu without her consent or involvement. Once Runu was married, the power over her was shifted from her parents to her mother in-law, who eventually forced Runu to leave her husband and children. At this point in Runu's life story, she was trafficked into the sex trade by a relative and power was shifted to her madam. After three years in the sex trade Runu was able to begin the process of shifting the power dynamics with her madam. She did this by using the knowledge and experience of other sex workers to convince her madam to start paying her some income for the sex work she was performing and allow her to leave the brothel for short periods of time. This was the first opportunity that Runu had to gain some power over her life. With this power, she took on a contract room so that she could become an independent sex worker and then left the sex trade completely.

Despite the disempowerment participants experienced from a young age they were still able to make choices, or enact agency within the confines of that exploitation. Priya's life story is a very good example of this. Priya did not have power over her own life until years after she had been trafficked into the sex trade, but despite this she demonstrates an ability to make choices within the confines of the powerless situation she found herself in. When Priya's father died, she was sold by a relative to a family, in this situation she had no power over what happened to her, however she made a choice to run away and return home. After a short time, at age 10 Priya's family arranged for her to be married, she had no control over this situation either, but shortly after her wedding she ran away and then again returned home. A year later she was again forced into an arranged marriage, after two years she enacted choice and left her husband to return home despite receiving physical and mental abuse from her family as a direct result of her decision. Priya describes enacting her agency,

I was very stubborn back then, I had decided I was not going back and nothing was going to change my mind.

All throughout Priya's pre-trafficking life she did not hold power, but was able to still make decisions to make the best out of the oppressive situation that she found herself in. This continued into Priya's trafficking experience, where she used the local gang and police to obtain better conditions for herself while still under the control of her madam. Other participants shared similar stories of trying to make the best of the situation they were in, by making choices, from a limited range of options and amid their oppressive environment.

As participants began to make choices for themselves from a limited range of options, and therefore enact agency, the power dynamics began to slowly shift with power being transferred from the hands of the madams back to the women. Women used different means to drive this shift in power; they used collective support, accessing legal assistance, and using the internal hierarchical structures of Sonagacchi to their benefit. For Joya, the other women in the brothel helped shift the power dynamics from her madam to herself. Joya received no income for the first five years that she was in the sex trade and was physically abused by her madam during that time. Other women working in the same brothel as Joya encouraged her to demand that her madam start to pay her some money for the sex work that she was doing.

Another girl from the brothel helped me get some extra food and money from my madam.... She told me how to speak to the madam so I would get money. She told me to say that I wouldn't work anymore until I got some money. They (other women in the brothel) told me if she (the madam) doesn't give you money, go and work in a different brothel where they give you money.

This collective support gave Joya the confidence to confront her madam, and Joya threatened to leave if she did not start to receive income. The madam in this situation still held the power and demanded her to pay an additional 10,000RPS before she could leave, however collective support again assisted Joya and a member of the Sonagacchi community lent her the money interest free, so that she could move into a different brothel and regain some power over her life. Joya reflected that without the support of her community, she would have not had the confidence to enact her agency and confront her madam in the manner that she did.

Trafficked women also can access legal assistance to regain power over their own lives. As discussed earlier when Priya tried to leave the sex trade and her madam refused she enlisted the assistance of the police through one of the local gangs. Priya had been in the sex trade for three years, and had received no income during that time. When she first asked her madam to let her go, her madam refused. Other women from Priya's brothel encouraged her to keep

fighting, and so Priya went to the local gang for assistance. They advised her to go to the police, which she did and the police came and spoke to her madam and told the madam that she was unable to keep Priya against her will. Although the police did not facilitate Priya's exit from the sex trade, despite the illegal nature of what was going on, the confrontation that Priya's madam had with the police was the catalyst in Priya getting a date from her madam in which she would have been able to leave her madam. Once Priya could leave her madam she began to regain power over her situation and was able to return to her family, before eventually re-joining the sex trade, as an independent sex worker, and then eventually exiting the sex trade altogether.

The third means that trafficked women use to shift the balance of power from the madam back to themselves, is through making use of the existing hierarchical structures that exist within Sonagacchi. As discussed in Chapter 3, the sex trade within Sonagacchi has its own structures and hierarchy and trafficked women can use this to regain more power over their situation. Runu is an example of this. When she was first trafficked into the sex trade she entered on a Chukri system where she received no money from the sex work she performed. Within a month, she was resold to a different madam, but remained under the Chukri system. After three years in the Chukri system, Runu moved into the Adihya system where she gained some income from her madam, and had the ability to refuse customers if unwell. After an unsuccessful exit attempt, due to pressure from her madam, Runu moved from the Adihya system to a contract system, where she had more agency and power over her situation. It was the move into this system that allowed her to pursue a further attempt at exiting the sex trade, which was successful. Runu used the structures of the sex trade to re-gain power over her own life. To progress within the existing hierarchical structures of Sonagacchi she had to fight to enact her agency, and with each progression agency 'thickened' and therefore a broader range of choices became available to her, which eventually led towards the choice to exit the sex trade.

As the shift in power took place in a trafficked woman's life story, it often became the catalyst for seeking exit from the sex trade. Women would press on the boundaries of the exploitation that they found themselves in, until eventually power was regained and they had a full option of choices over their lives, including the choice to exit. Early in the women's trafficking narrative, the exploitation and control would be at its peak with all the women reporting that in the first few months of their trafficking experience, they were never left alone unless they were locked in a room. Runu describes her first years in the sex trade,

When I was first in the trade, I didn't have any choice about what customers I took, even if I was sick I still had to take customers, my madam would make me..... I was not allowed to go anywhere, not even out of the room I was staying in, there was always someone with me to make sure I didn't run away. When I was first sold there wasn't even one second I was by myself..... It was after about three years that I could go out by myself.

As women pushed these boundaries they were given more choices, usually small ones at first, like the choice to leave their room when they wanted to, then as more time went on they would enact on their agency by pressing against the boundaries of their exploitation to gain more power until women were able to refuse customers when unwell or menstruating. As time progressed women also began to be able to earn some money for the sex work that they were doing. With this money came the opportunity to leave their madams for a different one who would treat them better, or to move up in the system of sex work so that they have more power over their own lives. At this point in the women's narratives, is when women often gain the choice to exit the sex trade completely for the first time since they were trafficked. For the women who participated in this research it occurred between three and five years from the time they were first trafficked into the sex trade. This regaining of power through a process of empowerment and enacting agency is crucial to trafficked women being able to successfully exit the sex trade. Women identified throughout their narratives that although the process of becoming empowered and regaining agency was a significant component of their freedom, empowerment and agency as with exit did not equate with freedom.

5.5 Trafficked women's experiences of freedom

The Bengali word for freedom is মুক্তি (mukti), and this word encapsulates more than just physical freedom, it refers to the freedom of the whole person body, mind and spirit. It can also be translated to mean liberation or release. For women trafficked into the sex trade, freedom is often assumed to be intrinsically linked to their time in the sex trade, the moment that they were trafficked is when freedom was lost, and the moment that they exit the sex trade is when freedom is regained (Govindan 2013 p526). However, this research showed that freedom was experienced by women as separate to their exit from the trade, and was more than an end product of thick agency and empowerment. The word mukti came up multiple times throughout each women's life story narrative, and many women noted that mukti, or lack of it, was not directly associated with being sold into the sex trade.

It is clear from the women's narrative stories, that their freedom is not necessarily linked to their entry and exit from the sex trade. For the women, their lack of power and lack of freedom existed before they were trafficked into the sex trade, and was a contributing factor to their vulnerability of being trafficked. Exiting the sex trade is also not equated with obtaining freedom, rather women identified that freedom was about freedom of body, mind, heart, and spirit. Finding freedom was equated with finding healing from the trauma and abuse that they had experienced during their life, and as such there was a strong link to a woman's psychological empowerment and her sense of freedom. Women who had found freedom, did not carry shame over their time in the trade, they had a sense of belonging to their community, and a strong spirituality, they also felt a strong commitment to pass on the hope of freedom to other women in the same situation as they were in.

Women noted that they had never know freedom throughout their life, and that it was sometime after they had exited the sex trade and joined the Freeset community when they regained freedom, with two of the participants commenting that they had not regained complete freedom at the time of the interview. Freedom seems to be conceptualised by the women as connected to liberation and new life. For Sukuntula, she recalls being asked by a Freeset staff member if she wanted to be free, at that point she did not know what freedom meant, from her perspective freedom was something that she had never experienced for herself and therefore could not imagine it to become part of her reality. All she knew at that point in her life, was that she wanted to get out of the sex trade. It was not until she had been at Freeset for some time that she began to experience aspects of freedom in her life.

Sukuntula links her finding freedom to her spiritual life. She believes that God was the orchestrator of her freedom. When she talks about her spirituality it is linked to the peace, respect, joy, and self-worth that she now has. Sukuntula recognises that she still carries hurt and pain with her, but that despite these difficulties her faith and the community that she has found at Freeset has helped her to find freedom.

Runu had a similar conception of freedom to Sukuntula, Runu also identified never having known freedom throughout her childhood or adolescence. It was only when she started working at Freeset, that she began to understand the concept of freedom. Runu also believes that God was the orchestrator of her exit from the sex trade, and the healing that has taken place within her. These two things combined for Runu to enable her to experience freedom for the first time in her life. There is also a link to concepts of good and bad associated with freedom. Runu comments about her being a good person now that she has found freedom:

“Besides, now I am a good person and no one can say anything against me. I have a good job and lead a good life”.

The narrative of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ were common amongst the participants, with women using the word ‘bad’ to describe themselves whilst in the trade, and linking the word ‘good’ to exit and post exit scenarios. This is connected to overcoming the cultural and gendered structures that the women face and the psychological empowerment that takes place in women’s lives as they journey towards exit in the sex trade. As women become psychologically empowered they begin to develop self-respect and self-worth, and this facilitates a change in their self-perception from someone who is bad to someone who is good. This psychological empowerment becomes another part of the overall picture of freedom for the women.

Joya’s life story narrative echoed that of Runu and Sukuntula’s when it came to concepts about freedom. Joya reflects,

At that time I didn’t know what they were talking about, I had never known freedom in my life, now I understand, but then I didn’t know what freedom means, but I wanted to work, I wanted my life to become good.

The closest concept that Joya could equate to freedom was that of a good life versus the life that she had experienced in the sex trade, which she describes as bad. Joya sees her ability to obtain freedom linked to her spirituality. The concepts of love, grace and forgiveness that are part of her spiritual belief system contributed to an increasing psychological empowerment, which in turn encourages social empowerment enabling Joya to articulate a sense of freedom for the first time.

The common themes that exist in the obtainment of freedom for Joya, Sukuntula and Runu are the concepts of spirituality, becoming a good person, and a sense of self-worth and self-respect. This ties in closely with the concept of mukti that is perceived to be holistic in nature, capturing both physical freedom (ie exit from the sex trade), as well as a psychological and spiritual freedom. Also common is that none of these women identified as having freedom before they were trafficked into the sex trade, for all the women, the culture and oppressive structures during their childhood, meant that freedom was never a reality for them. This was true to the point where women did not know what it looked like to have freedom, or even what freedom was. Important to note too, is that freedom for these women

did not happen until sometime after they left the sex trade. For them exiting the sex trade was a stepping stone towards freedom, not an actualisation of freedom.

Two of the participants stated that they had still not obtained freedom, Priya had a sense of what needed to occur in her life for freedom to be obtained, and is working towards achieving that. Priya had been out of the sex trade for 18 months at the time of her interview and commented that she had freedom, but not full freedom. Priya noted that she was well on the way to freedom, but she still lives within Sonagacchi, and feels that once she is living in a place outside of the red-light area that she will truly have freedom. Priya states:

I have found freedom in heart and mind here (Freeset) I want to get a place completely separate so I will have true freedom.

Priya has experienced much trauma and hardship during her life, however despite all of that and only being out of the sex trade for a relatively short period of time, she feels some aspects of freedom in her life. Priya feels that this is because of the acceptance that she has felt, and the family dynamic of Freeset. She reflects that her biological family has rejected her and disowned her, but at Freeset she was welcomed into a new family and she has a sense of belonging. It is this sense of belonging and being able to let go of the shame that she felt which has propelled Priya forward on her journey to finding freedom.

For Mini she does not have a sense of freedom and is unsure when or if it may be achieved. She states:

Where is the freedom in my life, where is the happiness? From the first to the last it will be pain and hardship. I have no husband, no children. I have no one.

Mini still carries with her the hurt and pain of the life that she has experienced. For Mini the loss of her husband to a stroke is the pain that hurts her the most. He is person responsible for her physical freedom, and when he died Mini felt like her freedom also died. The difference in Mini's life story compared to the other participants, is that Mini was not the orchestrator of her exit from the sex trade. Mini was rescued by a man who later became her husband, he was the facilitator of her leaving the trade, not Mini, and this may have contributed to her sense of unfreedom even though she has been out of the sex trade for approximately 40 years. Mini did not have power restored to her throughout her trafficking experience. Power went from the hand of her family, to her madam, then to her rescuer, and it was not until her husband died that Mini gained power over her own life. Mini also mentioned that before her

husband died she had a belief in God and his ability to bring freedom to her life. When her husband became unwell, she believed that God would heal her husband. When Mini's husband died she also lost her faith in God

I have abandoned God after He took my husband, but He has not abandoned me. He is giving me this work to help me so that I can help others.

Mini believes in the possibility of freedom for women trafficked into the sex trade, and it is this that drives her forward and gives purpose to her life, but she does not believe that freedom will be possible for her in this life.

5.6 Chapter Summary

Building on the literature and research discussed in Chapter's 2 and 3, this chapter has presented the findings of this thesis. The key exit strategies that women had applied when exiting a trafficking situation were discussed, with a particular emphasis on the strategies that support women and the obstacles that hinder a women's exit from the sex trade. Results show that all participants went through a process of empowerment where power structures were identified and women sought to disestablish these structures and regain power over their own lives. This process of empowerment began with women experiencing very 'thin' agency, but as women obtained the small goals that they had set for themselves, their agency 'thickened' and they set larger goals for themselves, continuing the process of empowerment. These smaller goals culminated in the successful execution of the larger goal to exit the sex trade. Once women successfully exited the sex trade, they began experiencing aspects of freedom, with the actualisation of freedom occurring alongside physical, emotional, and spiritual healing. The following chapter will explore these results in the light of the empowerment and freedom literature discussed in Chapter 2, examining how the results from this thesis contribute to the wider discourse on freedom among women trafficked into the sex trade.

Chapter 6:

A Deeper Look at the Empowerment of Trafficked Women.

6.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to understand and derive meaning from the findings presented in the previous chapter by undertaking a deep analysis and discussion of the findings. In this chapter, I draw on literature discussed in Chapter's 2 and 3 which informed the framework and background of this thesis. The findings from this research demonstrate that women who have been trafficked into the sex trade are becoming empowered even whilst they are in exploitative environments. The types of empowerment that trafficked women experience will be discussed, highlighting the empowerment processes that women go through on their journey towards empowerment. The concept of 'thin' and 'thick' agency introduced in Chapter 2 becomes an effective way to articulate how women can enact agency within the sex trade to journey towards empowerment. Finally, the concepts of empowerment and agency are discussed as I seek to understand how these two concepts interrelate and impact each other.

6.2 Different Types of Empowerment that Trafficked Women Experience

There are many different types of empowerment that individuals experience, which were discussed in detail in Chapter 2. The findings of this research have shown that women trafficked into the sex trade experience psychological, social, political, and economic empowerment to various degrees as they pursue exit from the sex trade. Empowerment in one dimension contributes to empowerment in other dimensions. Women's process of becoming empowered began early within their trafficking experience, with many women also engaging in empowerment processes in the midst of pre-trafficking oppression and exploitation.

The findings of this study indicated that participants became disempowered as they entered into the sex trade, but that women quickly began to become aware of their environment and determine what power structures existed, and what individuals held power over the women. Women then began to systematically target these individuals and structures under the guidance of other sex workers who had previously been in their situation. This led to women

slowly transforming their situation resulting in greater autonomy and decision-making ability. This process aligns with the definition of empowerment used for the purposes of this thesis as described in Chapter 2, described by Anderson and Sim (2004 p2).as,

the process of awareness and capacity building, which increases the participation and decision-making power of citizens and may lead to transformative action which will change opportunity structures in an inclusive and equalling direction.

Women who were trafficked into the sex trade became aware of the power structures in their environment, and began to have increased decision-making power as they shifted the power dynamics, and transformed their situations. Women were able to navigate these power structures as the red-light district of Sonagacchi, as discussed in Chapter 3, has its own cultural and social norms that differentiate from normal Bengali society. These differences are particularly apparent in the power structures, with most power holders within Sonagacchi being women. This implies that trafficked women have the ability to become empowered even whilst remaining in the sex trade.

A shift in power dynamics is key to the process of empowerment, with shifts needing to occur in the three dimensions of power; unequal relationships, a limited range of possibilities and the power to shape people's desires (Luke 1974 & Mayo 2004). Shifts in these three dimensions impact on the economic, social, psychological, and political empowerment that individuals experience. The findings, as presented in Chapter 5, showed that all women had an unequal power relationship with their madams at the time of their initial trafficking experience. Women formulated goals centred around this dimension of power, by attempting to increase their own power within the relationship that they had with their madam. This began with petitioning their madam to allow them to leave their rooms, then to leave the building, and to earn money from the sex work that they were doing.

The empowerment process is iterative, and has several movements closely connected to women's thickening of agency, which will be discussed in more depth below. As women became successful in addressing the unequal power dynamic that they had with their madam, the first movement of the empowerment process, they began to broaden the range of possibilities for their lives. A broadening of possibilities increased women's psychological empowerment and created space in which women could dream and hope for a new life outside the sex-trade. This process of shifting power dynamics in the women's lives created a platform in which a process of expanding their empowerment could occur.

The process of economic empowerment was also identified during a woman's time in the sex trade. As discussed in Chapter 3, trafficked women move throughout the structures of the red-light district, as women move from Chukri systems to adhiya systems they create an opportunity to earn money for themselves for the first time. Receiving money for the sex work that women were doing became a goal that trafficked women formulated. This goal was part of the second movement towards empowerment. As women increased their level of economic empowerment, their level of agency thickened, and new goals were formed. Gaining economic empowerment, and consequently income also provided women with the opportunity to continue to move within the structures of the red-light district as discussed in Chapter 3 and shown in Figure 3.1, thickening women's agency and creating further opportunities for economic empowerment.

An additional aspect of economic empowerment was overcoming issues of debt that acted as barriers towards successful exit. As discussed in Chapter 5 debt is often used by madams as a way to keep trafficked women in the sex trade. Beyrer (2004 p 546) comments that many women who have been trafficked into the sex trade are innumerate, and therefore have no way to keep track of their earnings and debt, women that do have some numeracy skills and can keep track of their debt are often resold into another brothel, incurring new debt, as they come close to repaying the original debt. In this way women are kept within the sex trade, bringing maximum profit to their madams and pimps.

The importance of economic empowerment, was highlighted in the participants search for alternative livelihood options. Access to employment that provided the women with a steady, secure income was the catalyst in women successfully being able to exit the sex trade. Participants described throughout their narratives that without employment, and an employer that understood their background and offered holistic support, they would not have been able to successfully exit the sex trade.

Another dimension where women became empowered was psychologically. Psychological empowerment could be seen in women's early trafficking experiences, as women sought to challenge the power structures. Participants in the research showed very high psychological empowerment during their exit processes and following exit from the sex trade. As mentioned in Chapter 2 psychological empowerment involves an individual making meaning out of her experiences and weaving them into a new story, psychologically empowered women show self-confidence, optimism and self-efficacy (Rowland-Serdar & Schwartz-Shea

1991). Women's increasing self-confidence and self-worth was shown throughout the narratives, in the changes in which the women described themselves. Women described themselves while in the sex-trade originally as 'a bad person' আমি খারাপ. However, as their narrative progresses and their psychological empowerment increased the description changed and women started describing themselves as good people 'এখন আমি ভাল' (now, I am good). The process of increased self-worth lead women towards an increased self-efficacy where they began to believe that they had the ability to leave the sex trade and be successful in an alternative livelihood option. This journey towards self-efficacy and psychological empowerment was not linear and took different amounts of time for each of the participants, but common among participants was that this dimension of empowerment was the catalyst in women setting a goal for themselves to exit the sex trade.

Closely linked with a women's psychological empowerment, was the development of her social empowerment. When women were first trafficked into the sex trade, they were isolated from others and their communication restricted. Women lacked knowledge of the context of their new environment, and the skills to know how to navigate the situation they now found themselves in, this left women socially, economically and psychologically disempowered. Gaining knowledge of the context that women found themselves in, and developing the skills to navigate their day to day life often became the first goal that women set for themselves. Women spent the first few days after being trafficked, talking to other women in the sex trade, to find out what they should do and how they should behave. Women who learnt these skills quickly, received better treatment from their madams and having social connections created opportunities for greater freedom in other areas of a woman's life such being able to leave the brothel or area for short periods of time. Srinivasa and Siddegowda (2015), agree commenting that social empowerment can often be a catalyst for gaining greater freedoms in everyday life as well as contributing towards empowerment processes in other dimensions. Once women gained more physical freedom they were able to participate in social organisations within the area. Access to the sex workers union is an example of this. Women in the sex trade who paid union membership fees, would receive support and protection from the police in the event of a raid. The social empowerment women experienced continued beyond their time in the sex trade, with women continuing to grow their knowledge, skills, and participation within social organisations after exiting the sex trade.

A woman's increase of psychological and social empowerment, contributed towards the increase in her political empowerment. Political empowerment was not so obvious in the beginning stages of women's trafficking experience, however as they gained psychological and social empowerment women began to use the power of voice and collective action. Participants described how women in the brothel gathered together to challenge a madam on the participants behalf. This collective action resulted in better circumstances for a woman, along with an understanding that collective voice can bring change even in highly exploitative environments. Narayan-Parker (2000), agrees commenting that when individuals can come together and use their voice change can occur, he also notes that this process can lead to further empowerment processes. As women became more empowered in other dimensions and exited the sex trade, the political empowerment they experienced increased. Women began to use the power of their own stories to bring about change in others. Women used their voices to assist other women who were in the sex trade to navigate pathways to empowerment.

Women also used their voices and collective action to challenge power structures in the red-light district for the benefit of other women. This included challenging madams who were not allowing women to exit the sex trade and loan sharks who used high interest rates to keep women in debt. However, at the time of the research women articulated that they did not have the ability to contribute to decision-making processes within the red-light community. The power for these decisions was still in the hands of brothel owners, madams and corrupt police. Women articulated that they had minimal hope for this to change, but that they could bring about change for others in the community at an individual level.

Despite large amounts of literature contending that trafficked women are disempowered and in need of rescue (Kristoff 1996, Lim 1998, UNICEF 2003, Flowers 2001, Rafferty 2007, and Lau 2008), this research has shown that in the midst of a woman's trafficking experience she was journeying towards empowerment. In particular, women showed high levels of economic, social, and psychological empowerment as was discussed above. Trafficked women were seeking to become empowered before their trafficking experience, and so it becomes a natural process that women continue to seek their own empowerment once trafficked. Organisations and individuals working with women who have been trafficked into the sex trade need to ensure that they are encouraging women to journey towards their own empowerment. Assuming that all women who have been trafficked into the sex trade are victims in need of rescue would only serve to disempower the women. Rescue is a necessary

intervention particularly in the case of minors and newly trafficked women, however for women who are regaining levels of empowerment and agency within their trafficking situation other interventions focusing on self-empowerment may prove to be more beneficial.

6.3 The Empowerment Process in Action

Women trafficked into the sex trade take steps towards empowerment in various domains throughout their lives. The process of empowerment exists on a continuum from disempowered to empowered, with different levels of power generated as women move along this continuum. In order to understand how trafficked women journey from disempowerment toward empowerment, I will revisit Cattaneo and Goodman's (2015) empowerment process model as discussed in Chapter 2. The model was designed initially to understand the process of empowerment in individuals experiencing intimate partner violence, and then to be transferred into other social justice related fields. The findings of this research showed that this model can be used to effectively articulate the process of empowerment for women who have been trafficked into the sex trade.

Cattaneo and Goodman's model consists of six components which are all influenced by the social context that an individual finds themselves in, for this study the social context is the red-light district of Sonagacchi, Kolkata. As discussed in Chapter 2, the model begins with the formulation of a personally meaningful goal. This goal may be an immediate goal: What do I want to happen right now? Or an ultimate goal: What do I want to happen in the long term? For Priya, one of the participants in the study her ultimate goal once she had been trafficked was to leave the sex trade, but her immediate goal was to learn the power structures within the brothel so that she would be able to negotiate to leave her room when she wanted which in turn would give her a small measure of independence. The ultimate goal for women who have been trafficked into the sex trade, may not necessarily be to exit the sex trade. Individuals or organisations working with women who have been trafficked into the sex trade should not assume that they know the goals that women wish to achieve, rather they should work to allow the women to set goals that have personal meaning for them (Kasturirangan 2008). Personally meaningful goals are particularly motivating for individuals (Deci & Ryan 2000 & Markland et al 2005), and drive the behavioural components of the model (Cattaneo & Goodman 2015).

Self-efficacy is the first of the behavioural components within the model, and along with personally valued goals makes up the 'motivation hub' of the empowerment process model

(Locke & Latham 2002 p 709). The belief that an individual has about what they can accomplish is impacted and influenced, by past experiences, opportunities, obstacles and resources within their environment. In Priya's life story narrative, for example, her pre-trafficking experience involved exploitation and abuse (See Appendix 5), but her ability to overcome these experiences contributed to her entering her trafficking situation with a sense of self-efficacy. Priya stated, "once I have set my mind on something, there is nothing anyone can do to stop me, my life has made me like that". This demonstrates her high levels of self-efficacy and contributes to her empowerment process particularly in the psychological domain. In Mini's life story narrative, for example, it was the positive upbringing that she received and good relationship with her father (See Appendix 5) that created a strong sense of self-efficacy. Mini was only 12 years old when trafficked into the sex trade, but the strong role models of her parents as well as positively adapting to becoming a refugee and living in a refugee camp created a strong basis of self-efficacy which she carried through to her trafficking experience.

Alongside self-efficacy in the behavioural components of the empowerment model, are knowledge and competency (Cattaneo & Goodman 2015). For women to successfully move through empowerment processes as explained in this model, they need the knowledge to know what actions they should take to help them achieve their goal, and the competence to utilise this knowledge in an effective way (Gutierrez 1991). All participants in this study, articulated that their first goal following their trafficking event was aimed at gaining more knowledge, in order to assist them in achieving their ultimate goal of leaving the sex trade. For Priya and Sukuntula knowledge and competency skills came from other, more experienced sex workers who shared tips on how to get madams to give more freedoms, and how to safely interact with customers. The knowledge that was gained from other sex workers increased women's competency levels and assisted in achieving goals that they had set for themselves.

Once the goal has been set, and women have the self-efficacy, knowledge, and competency to achieve their goal action can take place. The action phase of the empowerment process is shaped by all the other aspects of the process. The action that leads towards empowerment, is usually generated by the woman's own perception of her situation, and not through external influences (Freire 2000). The types of steps towards achieving goals, that women in this study took were broad ranging depending on context that the woman found herself in. Joya's goal to move from an Chukri system into an Adihya system involved many action points,

including selling her jewellery, hiding money from her madam, and negotiating with her madam to pay of her purchase price.

The final phase of the empowerment process is just as important as the action taken, it is the reflection on the impact that that action has had on a woman's situation. In this phase the role that the power structures within the red-light district and brothel have becomes apparent (Cattaneo & Goodman 2015). The role of impact on women's empowerment process can be seen through Runu's experience of seeking exit from the sex trade that was hampered by the pressures placed on her by her madam. Runu was able to realise that it was the Adihya structure and pressure from her madam that stopped her from achieving her goal rather than something that was within her control to change. Therefore, the reflection phase was an important way to maintain self-efficacy and fine tune the smaller goals that were needed to achieve Runu's ultimate goal of exiting the sex trade. In some cases that the failure of actions to achieve the desired outcome may set an individual back in their empowerment process. This is particularly relevant if a woman is in the initial stages of her journey towards empowerment, where a perceived failure has the ability to stall or reverse the process of empowerment.

The processes of goal setting, self-efficacy, knowledge, competency, action, and impact together combine to form a model to demonstrate the process of empowerment that women trafficked into the sex trade where experiencing. Women have cycled through these processes multiple times as they journeyed towards achieving their ultimate goal of exiting the sex trade. The more women cycle through this process, and achieve the goals that they have set for themselves, the more empowered they are becoming. An integral part of women's empowerment process is the level of agency that they experience. How women enact agency within the confines of exploitation will be discussed in more detail in next section.

6.4 Enacting Agency in the Confines of Exploitation

The concept of 'thick' and 'thin' agency was discussed in Chapter 2 (Klocker 2007), and was originally used to conceptualise agency in child domestic workers. This concept also fits well in the context of women who have been trafficked into the sex trade. Klocker (2007) determined that thin agency referred to decisions and actions that were carried out within highly restrictive environments with few viable alternatives. For women who have been trafficked into the sex trade, thin agency can be effectively used to articulate the level of agency that they experience when they are first trafficked. The notion of thin agency affirms

the exploitive and restrictive environment that women trafficked into the sex trade experience, but also acknowledges that even the seemingly disempowered possess an ability to act (Foucault 1982). Alternatively, thick agency refers to having the autonomy to act within a broad range of options (Klocker 2007).

All individuals are placed somewhere along a continuum from thin to thick agency. Structures, contexts and relationships act as thickeners and thinners of an individual's agency (Bell & Punch 2007). Many factors that women identified as being key to their successful exit from the sex trade were thickening factors to the level of agency that the women experienced, and the range of options that women could choose from. The factors that influence women's thinned and thickened agency are discussed below.

Thinning Factors

Findings from the study indicated three main factors that contributed to a thinning in agency for women as they sought to exit the sex trade. These are summarised in Figure 6.1 below. The pressure that madams placed on women during their time in the sex trade was identified as a key thinning factor of a woman's agency. As discussed in section 3.4 women in Chukri and Adihya systems are under the complete control of a madam, and rely on the madam for housing, food, and protection from violent customers. The power dynamics of the relationship are heavily weighted in the madam's favour and this power dynamic heavily influences the initial levels of agency that a trafficked woman will experience.

In Runu's situation the pressure from her madam to perform sex work for the majority of the day reduced her agency as she could not meet the expectations of her madam whilst training for a new job. The pressure from Priya's madam kept her agency at very thin levels for the first three years that she was in the sex trade, during this time Priya's madam forced her to remain within the brothel and kept all earnings that Priya made from the sex trade. Limiting Priya's ability to move freely, and denying her of any income created the environment of thin agency, and decreased Priya's sense of self-efficacy and autonomy and limited the range of options available to her. In Joya's situation, the pressure she received from her madam was through physical violence. The physical violence that Joya experienced from her madam was felt as pressure to perform sex work without complaint, Joya felt that if she complained or resisted then the violence would increase. For Joya, this perpetual state of fear and pressure from her madam slowed her pursuit of a thicker agency and her own empowerment. Pressure

from madams thinned women's agency, however women used empowerment process to thicken agency and change the power dynamics that existed.

Figure 6.1: Factors that Thin Agency in Women Trafficked into the Sex Trade

Thinning Factors		Impact on Agency
Increased Pressure from Madams	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decreased self-efficacy • Decreased Autonomy 	Limits the range of options women can choose from.
Family Pressure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decreased Support systems • Decreased self-efficacy 	Reduces a women's desire to 'thicken' her agency and increase the range of options she can choose from.
Social Stigma	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased sense of fatalism • Decreased self-efficacy • Decrease in a sense of hope • Decrease in self worth 	Limits the range of options that women can choose from and reduces the desire for women to 'thicken' their agency.

In addition to the pressure women received from their madams, family pressure was also identified to be a thinning factor. In Priya's case once her agency had thickened to the point where she was able to leave the sex trade, she returned home. Once at home, Priya's mother advised her to return to the sex-trade and make the most out of the situation she had found herself in. As discussed in Chapter 3, India is a collectivist culture that places high importance on the advice and instruction given by family members, particularly older siblings and parents. Priya understood that she needed the support from her family to be able to remain away from the sex trade. Priya had battled with her madam to allow her to leave the brothel and return to her mother, indicating a 'thicker' agency, and a wider range of options from which she could make decisions. The lack of support that she received from her family, and encouragement to return to the sex trade meant that her agency was reduced and in order to support herself she had to return to the sex trade (See Figure 3.2). On realising that she did not have the support of her family to remain away from the sex trade, Priya made the decision to re-enter the sex trade as an independent sex-worker. Ok and this was an empowered decision?

The ‘thickening’ and ‘thinning’ processes that occurred throughout Priya’s life demonstrates the complexity of empowerment processes and cements the notion that the ‘thickening’ of agency is not a linear process. Women who encounter pressure from their family members feel as if they have lower levels of support and this can lead to a decreased sense of self-efficacy as women struggle to see how they might achieve successful exit from the sex trade without the support of their family. Decreased self-efficacy impacts on a woman’s overall agency as she may develop a fatalistic attitude and less of a desire to push for greater agency and empowerment within her trafficking situation.

Connected to the pressure from family to remain in the sex trade, is the social stigma that exists in India regarding sex work. This stigma is often a major contributing factor to the pressure families place on women to remain in the sex trade. As discussed in Chapter 3, the stigma of sex work would bring shame to a rural family causing a family to disown their daughter, or force the woman to return to the sex trade. The social stigma also occurs in Kolkata with women who are in the sex trade often denied housing, medical care and referred to as ‘bad women’ (খারাপ). This stigma can lead to feelings of low self-worth, low self-efficacy, lack of hope that her situation will improve, and a sense of fatalism (Dasra 2013). These feelings impact on a woman’s agency by decreasing her desire to push for thicker agency within her situation, and by limiting the range of options she can choose from. Despite these factors thinning a woman’s agency, there were also factors that thickened a woman’s agency.

Thickening Factors

The findings indicated two main factors that contributed towards a trafficked woman’s agency becoming thicker, shown in Figure 6.2 below. The first factor was the presence of a support person. As discussed in Chapter 5, Runu’s neighbour was a person that encouraged Runu to exit the sex trade, although Runu’s attempt to exit the sex-trade was unsuccessful, the support that Runu received from her neighbour gave her an increased sense of self-belief. For the first time since Runu had been trafficked someone had belief in her ability to exit the sex trade and this external belief translated to an increased sense of self-efficacy for Runu which gave her the confidence to make a second successful exit attempt from the sex trade. The presence of a support person also increased self-worth and reversed some of the effects that social stigma has on a woman in the sex trade as discussed earlier. This support person was someone who journey alongside the trafficked women offering encouragement and

support in her current space, rather than a person who was wanting to rescue or remove the woman from her situation. The increased self-efficacy along with a personal sense of self-worth impacts on a woman's agency by creating a sense of support and encouragement to push against the power structures that she encounters to thicken her agency, and increase the range of options available to her.

The second factor that thickens a woman's agency is the presence of a relationship with somebody who has been trafficked and has encountered a similar experience to the individual. Shared experience gave women a sense of hope for their own situation, seeing someone who had overcome a situation similar to their own showed women that change could also be possible for them. Having a relationship with a person who has had a similar experience also provided women with support structures and increased knowledge about how to increase their own agency. In many cases, this person also became a support person for the woman, so increased self-worth and self-efficacy are added benefits. All these factors impact on agency and empowerment by identifying pathways towards achieving greater agency and practical support to assist women as they seek to increase their agency.

Figure 6.2: Factors that Thicken Agency in Women Trafficked into the Sex Trade

Thickening Factors		Impact on Agency
Presence of a Support Person	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased self-worth • Increased self-efficacy • Increased support structures 	Women feel supported to push against power structures in order to increase the range of options available to them.
Relationship with a person who has had a similar experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased self-worth • Increased hope in possibility of change • Increased knowledge • Increased self-efficacy • Increased support structures 	Pathways towards the 'thickening' of agency are identified, and there is practical support to assist women as they increase their levels of agency.

Early stages of women's trafficking experience see women operating from an extremely narrow range of options. As time progresses and they enact on the agency that they have, the range of options available to them increased, and the agency thickend until women have the ability to act within a broad range of options. For example, during a woman's childhood, participants experienced normal levels of agency for their age. The moment where she was

trafficked, is where her agency became very thin with a limited range of options. The findings from this study showed that at this moment the agency was not necessarily observable action, but rather motivation and meaning. The motivation and meaning for women was the desire to change the oppressive nature of the situation that they found themselves in, the motivation to make change is the beginning of their psychological empowerment process. As outlined in Chapter 2 Couthlard's (2012), definition of agency is the ability to make choices and act on these choices. This narrow definition of agency would assert that trafficked had non-existent agency during their initial trafficking experience. This research however, showed that agency was present during a women's initial trafficking experience. The thin agency that women experienced was the catalyst for empowerment processes and thickening of agency. Miriam (2005) agrees, asserting that agency is more than just observable action particularly when the agency is thin. Women enacted their thin agency by setting small, achievable goals, the first post-trafficking goal often centred around women being able to leave their brothel room for short periods of time. Women began to petition madams to allow them to leave their room, their agency consisted of the motivation and state of mind to regain some power over their lives even in small ways. When women achieved this first goal, their agency could be observed through the action of choosing when they would be in their room and when they would go outside.

The level of agency that women experienced in this initial phase remained thin, but became the catalyst of future goals and the eventual thickening of women's agency. Once this first goal was met, the next goal consisted of being able to leave the brothel, women continued to form these goals until they were in a position of experiencing thick agency. A woman's level of agency continued to expand after she had exited the sex-trade, with women setting new goals for themselves that continued to challenge unequal power dynamics.

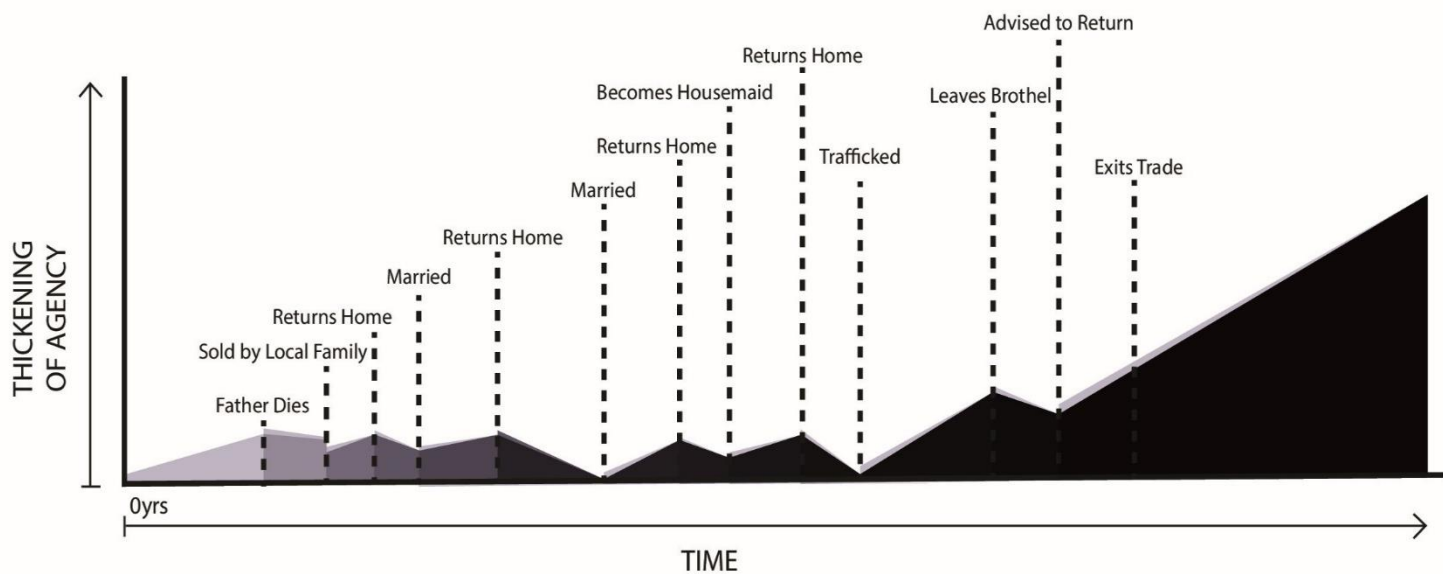
The process of women's agency becoming thicker, as these examples have shown, is not simply a linear incremental process. There are structures and external factors that either thin or thicken a women's agency. A woman's agency may thicken in the first few years after being trafficked, developing a range of options from which she can choose from. She could then be re-trafficked to another brothel or madam (see Figure 3.2) and return to a very thin agency, restarting the process of empowerment from a lower level. Women's experience of thickening agency is closely linked to her empowerment process, how these concepts are linked and work in practice will be discussed in more depth below.

6.5 The Interconnectedness of Empowerment and Agency

As discussed above the process of empowerment and agency are interconnected. As women seek to become empowered in different areas of their lives, they identify strategies and paths to thicken their agency, with the ultimate aim of obtaining freedom. Early in women's trafficking experience the thickening of agency occurs through an increase in psychological empowerment as their self-efficacy and self-worth grows. Further along in women's trafficking experience the thickening of agency triggers empowerment in other dimensions such as social and economic. As agency becomes thick women experience aspects of political empowerment. Following women's exit from the sex trade, empowerment continues to increase with women experiencing increasing levels of empowerment in all dimensions.

To exemplify the connection between empowerment processes and the thickening of agency, I will use two case studies, Priya and Runu. I have chosen to use Priya as her narrative life story highlights the thickening of agency and empowerment following her trafficking experience. Runu's life story narrative focuses on how the empowerment process is not always straight forward and incremental, but rather women often experience setbacks on their journey towards empowerment. Below, in Figure 6.3 is an example of Priya's life story showing the thickening and thinning of her agency. This figure shows that Priya experienced thin agency before her trafficking into the sex trade. Previous experience at thickening her agency and empowerment processes provided her with the self-belief and confidence to again work towards the thickening of her agency and empowerment following her trafficking into the sex trade.

Figure 6.3: Priya's experience of Agency

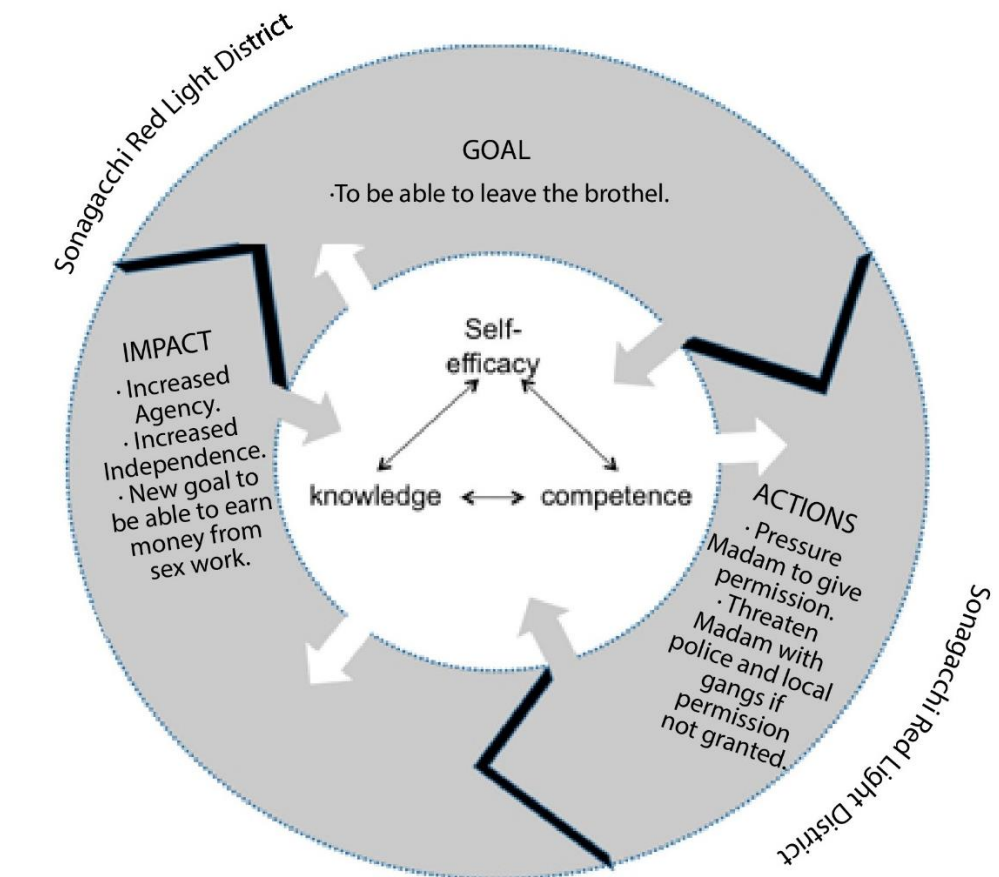


Priya's life began well, with her experiencing normal levels of agency for a child, however at eight years old, when her father died her agency decreased. Her agency was further thinned when at age 10 she was sold to a neighbouring family. It was at this time that Priya used decision making and goal setting as described in section 6.3 to thicken her agency by running away and returning to her mother. Priya's agency was again thinned at the age of 10 when she was forced into an arranged marriage. Priya continued to experience a thinning and thickening of her agency throughout her life before she was trafficked into the sex trade at age 17. Priya's agency thickened as she fought to be able to leave the brothel, but was thinned as her mother told her to return to the sex trade. Following this, Priya's agency continued to increase as she became more empowered and left the sex trade at 22 years of age. In Priya's case there was a great degree of change in her level of agency prior to her trafficking, with a general trend towards a thickening of her agency after she was trafficking.

A significant thickening in Priya's agency came about when she was able negotiate being able to leave her brothel for short periods of time. This thickened Priya's agency as it gave her a wider range of options from which she could make decisions. In the process of thickening agency, Priya also became empowered in the social and psychological dimensions. The ability to come and go from the brothel for short periods of time gave Priya a greater sense of self-efficacy and independence. Figure 6.4 draws on Cattaneo and

Goodman's (2015) empowerment process model to demonstrate the processes that Priya employed to achieve her goal and thicken her agency.

Figure 6.4 Empowerment Process Model demonstrating a goal developed by Priya



Source: Adapted from Cattaneo and Goodman 2015 p84.

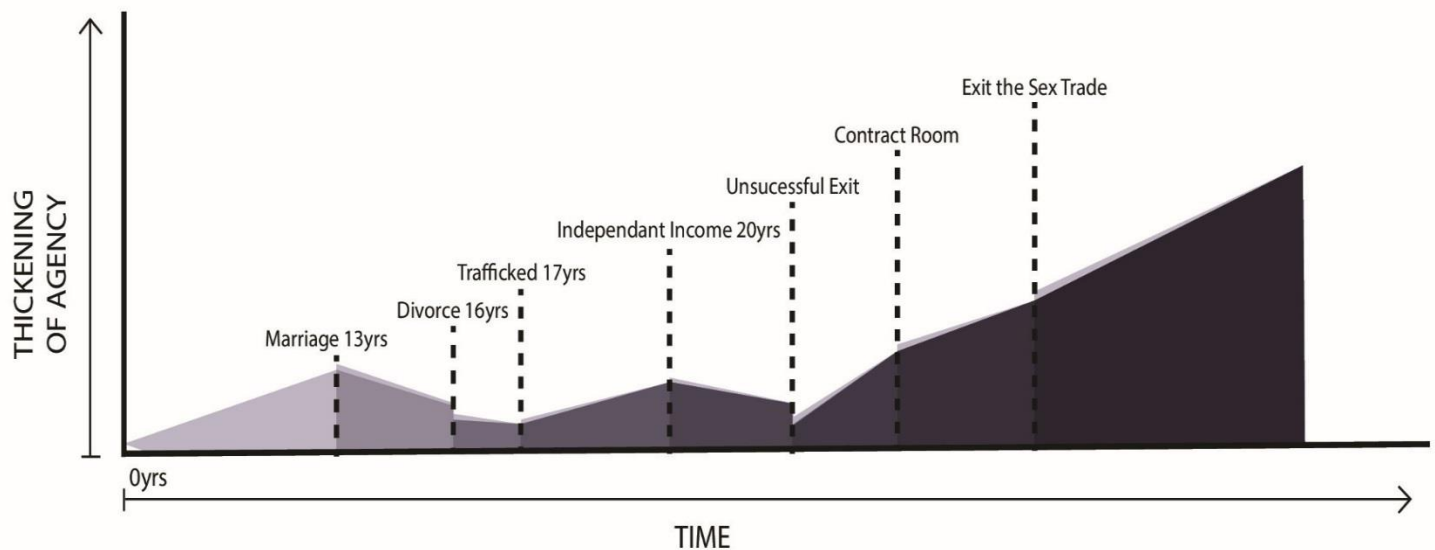
As seen in Figure 6.4, Priya set a *goal* to be able to leave the brothel building that she has been trafficked into for short periods of time. The formation of this goal came about through the reflection on the impact that her previous goal had on her situation. The goal had personal meaning as being able to leave the brothel would provide her with increased freedom to move about, and would open up opportunities to further understand the Sonagacchi area that she then lived in. Priya's previous experience of being able to successfully navigate her ability to leave her brothel room when she wanted to, contributed to her sense of *self-efficacy*, and the sense that she could achieve this goal. Priya talked to other sex workers from her brothel who had already achieved this goal, finding out how they did it and what she would need to do in order to successfully achieve her goal.

With this *knowledge* Priya *took action*, her first action point was to pressure her madam to allow her to leave the brothel for short periods of time. Priya did this through enlisting the help of other women in the brothel. The use of this collective voice, as discussed earlier, can be a powerful force in challenging existing power structures. In this case, this action alone was insufficient for Priya to achieve her goal. Priya's second action point was to threaten the madam, if she did not allow Priya to leave the brothel, then Priya would approach the local gangs and police for help. The threat of involving local gangs and police, along with the possibility of violence or imprisonment that the threat implied was enough in this case for Priya to be granted permission to leave the brothel.

Following the successful achievement of her goal, Priya then reflected on the *impact* of that this goal had. In this case, Priya gained an increased sense of independence, and for the first time since she was trafficked was able to go outside. This goal also contributed to an increase or thickening (Klocker 2007), in her agency. Priya now had more choices available to her. The successful achievement of her goal contributed back into the centre of the empowerment process by increasing Priya's self-efficacy and knowledge as well as the skill and competence needed to know how to achieve her future goals. As Priya reflected on the impact of achieving her goal she began to form a new goal, in this case it was the goal to begin to earn money from the sex work that she did. Each goal achieved has added to the level of empowerment that Priya experienced and propelled her forward to achieving the next goal.

Unlike Priya, Runu did not have difficulty finding an alternative livelihood option to facilitate her exit from the sex trade. Runu found that she had a thinned agency due to the pressure from her madam to remain in the sex trade, eventually contributing to an unsuccessful attempt to exit the sex trade. Runu's experience of Agency is exemplified in Figure 6.5 below.

Figure 6.5 Runu's Experience of Agency



As shown in Figure 6.5, Runu experienced normal levels of agency for a girl child in India throughout her childhood. At age twelve, Runu developed romantic feelings for a boy in her village. Runu's older brother did not agree with this relationship however, so at age thirteen Runu was given an arranged marriage to another man of her brother and fathers choosing. This was Runu's first (dramatic) experience of thinned agency. Runu experienced physical and emotional abuse from her husband and mother in law, until at age sixteen a consequence of her thin agency saw her forced to leave and return to her family's home without her children by her mother in law. A year later at age seventeen, Runu's agency reached its thinnest point when she was trafficked from Bangladesh to Kolkata's sex trade. Runu identified that at this moment her sense of hopelessness and fear was at a high point.

Following Runu's initial trafficking event, her agency remained thinned for the first three years until she began to earn money from her sex work and was able to leave the brothel for short periods of time. This gave her greater physical and economic independence and Runu began to feel empowered at an economic and social level as she was able to meet with people outside of the sex trade. Runu's agency continues to thicken until she attempted to leave the sex trade, at this time Runu's madam exerted pressure and control over Runu and her agency thinned as her madam restricted and limited the range of options that Runu could choose from halting opportunities for Runu's economic independence. Runu then aimed to change

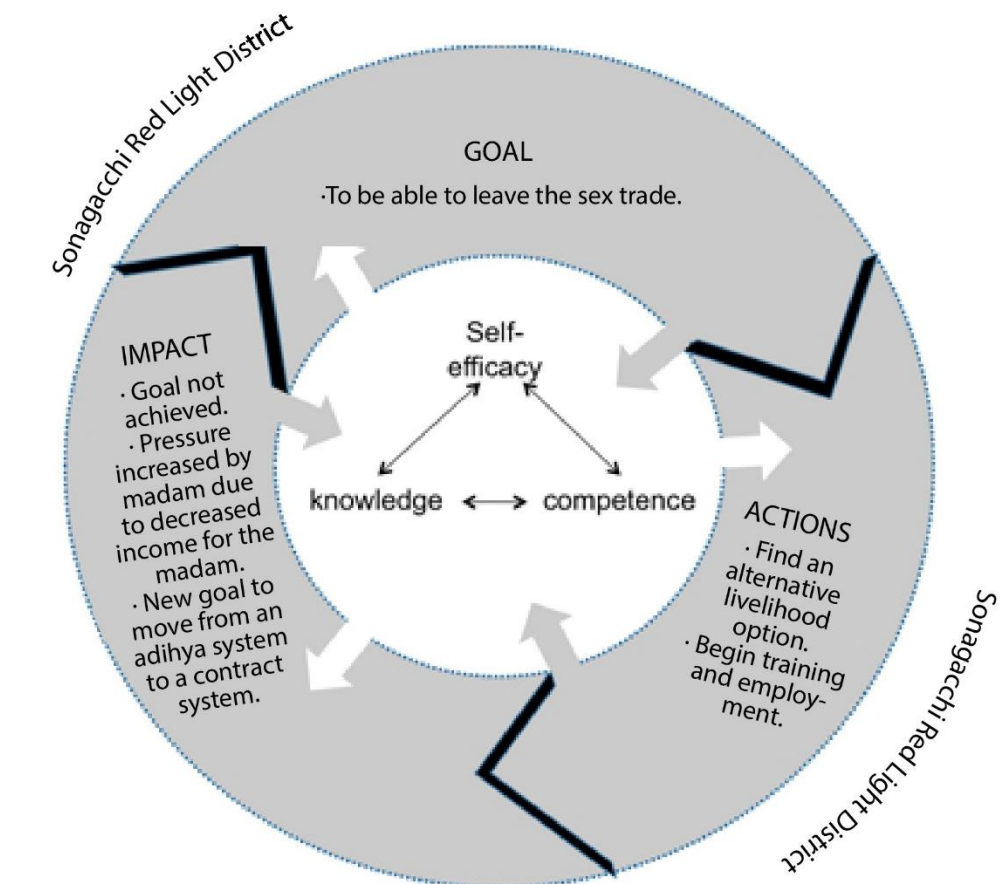
her situation so that she would be free from the restrictions of her madam. Runu saved money and with the help of friends within the community moved into a contract room, and became an independent sex worker. When Runu became an independent sex worker her agency thickened, she now had the autonomy to choose from a wide variety of options. Runu's agency continued to thicken as she successfully exited the sex trade this process of enacting agency and becoming more empowered when in the sex trade enabled Runu to enact more agency and had a further empowering effect as she exited.

As discussed earlier, the empowerment process is neither linear nor incremental. Women experienced success and set backs in their pursuit of their ultimate goal to exit the sex trade. As women move throughout the empowerment process, they will not always be successful in the goals that they set for themselves, however these unsuccessful attempts still contribute to their overall empowerment journey (Wood 2014). An example of this can be seen in Runu's goal to exit the sex trade. Runu's first attempt to exit the sex trade was unsuccessful, this impacted on her agency as she was unable to enact the choice she desired, to train for an alternative livelihood option. The empowerment process and the reflection of the impact of her actions, however ensured that overall Runu's psychological and social empowerment were not adversely affected. The processes involved in this particular decision are shown in Figure 6.6 below.

Runu set the *goal* of being able to exit the sex trade, this goal came after many years in the sex trade, and following the successful achievement of multiple earlier goals throughout her journey towards empowerment. This goal was personal to Runu, as it would enable her to be independent for the first time in her life, and leave the environment that she was trafficked into, but not go back to her previous life. Exiting the sex trade was the big end goal following many smaller goals. Runu's existing *knowledge* of the Sonagacchi red light context, as well as her high levels of *self-efficacy* contributed towards the setting of this new goal.

The first *action* step that Runu formulated was to secure employment for herself. Runu needed to find an alternative livelihood option if she was going to be able to exit the sex trade, and still provide for herself and her family back in Bangladesh. Another woman in Runu's brothel had successfully exited the sex trade and was working for a neighbouring business. Runu used this relationship to secure a job for herself. Runu then implemented her second action point, and began training and work with her new employer.

Figure 6.6 Empowerment Process Model demonstrating the goal developed by Runu



Source: Adapted from Cattaneo and Goodman 2015 p84.

As Runu began training for her new job, she began to get increased pressure from her madam. At the time of Runu's goal to exit the sex trade, she was in an Adiya sex work system (as described in Chapter 3). This meant that there was a direct correlation to the amount of time that Runu was performing sex work and the amount of income that Runu's madam was receiving. As Runu reflected on the *impact* of her actions she recognised that a full day of training with her new employer left her little time for sex work, and when Runu did have time, she was often tired from a full day of learning new skills. As a result of the pressure from Runu's madam and reflection on the impact of her actions, Runu resigned from the new job she had acquired and returned to sex work full time. Runu then formulated a new goal to move from an Adihya sex work system to a contract based system.

This process of reflection and new goal formation in the face of ‘failure’ to achieve a goal, gave Runu a greater understanding about what needed to take place in order to become successful in achieving her ultimate goal to exit the sex trade. Runu’s sense of self-efficacy remained high due to the success in her ability to secure an alternative livelihood option, and her experience of the successful achievement of previous goals. Runu became successful in her new reformed goal, and this provided her the platform to achieve her goal to exit the sex trade at a later time. Even though in Runu’s case the new goal led to success, it is important to note that failure to achieve goals early in the empowerment process can decrease a woman’s self-efficacy and her ability to set new achievable goals for herself if she has not experienced the success in achieving goals up until this point.

Understanding factors that contribute to the thinning and thickening of women’s agency is important for effective outcomes. Organisations and individuals who work among women in the sex trade can use these factors to help facilitate the thickening of a woman’s agency and in turn her experience of empowerment. The focus on shared experience and a support person highlights the need for spaces of connection within red-light areas, such as drop-in centres. As well as drop-in centres, community workers who spend time with sex workers supporting and encouraging them, whether they wish to exit the sex trade or not, will be an effective way to help build up women’s self-efficacy, hope, and self-worth and contribute to a thickening of their agency.

6.6 Trafficked Women’s Experience of Freedom

Empowerment and agency were key concepts that women experienced as they exited their trafficking situation and left the sex trade, however what women actually aspired to achieve was freedom. Freedom was not automatically experienced by women once they exited the sex trade, rather it was identified as a distinct concept. The Bengali word that women used to articulate freedom, মুক্তি (mukti), has spiritual and psychological connotations, which brings understanding about how a woman may have exited the sex trade, but not describe herself as free.

Women who described themselves as having freedom (mukti) had a sense of wholeness in themselves, with high levels of psychological empowerment, and a strong sense of spirituality and emotional restoration. In order for trafficked women to experience freedom, there needs to be healing from the traumatic events that women had experienced. Spirituality that was founded on new beginnings, grace, and forgiveness were catalysts for women to

experience that healing. Freedom was not an automatic end product of increased agency and empowerment, while it is connected, it is a much broader concept than empowerment and agency.

Freedom was defined in Chapter 2 by Deneulin (2005), as the real opportunity that people have, to accomplish what they value however, in light of the findings of this study a broader definition is needed that goes beyond physical accomplishments to include intrapsychic aspects of freedom. For Sukuntula, the intrapsychic aspects of her freedom were linked to her spiritual life and beginning to learn how to pray. She links her ability to pray to the internal strength and peace that she now has. Before Sukuntula experienced freedom and she had a problem, she would feel scared and not know what to do, or how to overcome the problem. Now she articulates that when she has a problem she will pray and experience a sense of peace and inner strength that gives her the confidence to know that she can overcome any obstacle that she might face. Sukuntula articulates that when she realised that she had undergone this internal shift she knew that she was free.

In light of Sukuntula and other participants description of freedom, Deneulin's definition becomes inadequate. Freedom becomes more than a set of everyday practices and experiences, rather freedom is a state of mind that implies a personal contentment and well-being. This conceptualisation of freedom needs to be contextual and personal to the individual involved, rather than a prescribed definition. Freedom as experienced by formerly trafficked women is not just about the ability to act and capabilities as Sen's work reviewed in Chapter 2 implies. Freedom rather is a sense of contentment and personal well-being, implying that freedom will look different for each individual and that to facilitate freedom an understanding of people's social world's, language and world view is needed.

Chapter 2 also discussed how the UN (2013) General Assembly recognised that social, political, economic, and cultural aspects of development are needed for individuals to realise freedom. These aspects link to dimensions of empowerment discussed earlier in the chapter. Although empowerment and overcoming structures of power are important to development and the obtainment of freedom, pursuing freedom can not end at empowerment processes. In order for complete freedom to be realised well-being for individuals should be prioritised recognising that their will be not prescriptive definition for what this entails, rather it will be highly personal and highly contextual.

A trafficked woman's experience of freedom is not the black and white process that is suggested in the literature, of a woman being free, losing her freedom when trafficked, and regaining freedom on exit from the sex trade (Kristoff 1996, Lim 1998, UNICEF 2003, Flowers 2001, Rafferty 2007, and Lau 2008). Freedom was something that women did not experience prior to their trafficking experience. Women articulated that they had never experienced a sense of personal freedom throughout their childhood and adolescence but rather felt weighed down by the burden of responsibility they carried and the constrictions of growing up within a patriarchal society. Women articulated that due to their childhood and adolescence experiences, they did not understand what freedom was until they had exited the sex trade and entered the Freeset environment where other formerly trafficked women began to talk about their own experiences of freedom.

Not all women who had participated in the research identified themselves as having freedom despite all having exited the sex trade. Two women stated during their narratives that they were not free, had lower levels of psychological empowerment and articulated that they did not feel an emotional or spiritual restoration to their lives. As discussed in Chapter 5, Mini still carries hurt and pain from her past experiences and the loss of her husband, she also feels abandoned by God. These feelings contribute to her feeling as though she is not yet free despite having exited the sex trade over forty years ago. Mini did not go through the same empowerment processes that other participants experienced as her husband was the orchestrator of her exit from the sex trade¹¹. Not having the opportunity to work towards her own empowerment, has left Mini without the self-efficacy and skills to process the trauma that she had experienced.

6.7 Chapter Summary

Women who have been trafficked into the sex trade are not simply helpless victims of their circumstances, rather they are women who from the beginning of their trafficking experience enact their thin agency to journey towards empowerment. As women become empowered their knowledge, skills, and self-efficacy increase contributing to the setting of goals to increase their agency and levels of empowerment. These goals also tackle the power structures within the red-light district to assist women as they become empowered. The factors that contribute to the thickening of a woman's agency where also key strategies that contributed to a woman's successful exit from the sex trade. This chapter demonstrated that

¹¹ See Appendix 5 for a summary of Mini's life story narrative

agency and empowerment are process that trafficked women use to exit the sex trade, and that these processes impact on each other further facilitating thicker agency and empowerment, as women seek to obtain a sense of personal freedom.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

This thesis sought to explore trafficked women's experience and understanding of freedom. The research took place among women who were trafficked into the Sonagacchi red light district in Kolkata, India and who had successfully exited the sex trade. Chapter 1 highlighted that the eradication of trafficking in all its form is a target of Sustainable Development Goal 5, 7, and 8. These goals are extremely optimistic considering trafficking numbers are increasing with approximately 40.3 million trafficked persons present currently (ILO 2017 p21). In order to have any chance of eradicating trafficking within the next twelve years a greater understanding is needed of trafficked individuals' experiences.

This study has contributed the body of research on trafficking by exploring women's empowerment processes, agency and experiences of freedom. As discussed in Chapter 2 empowerment is an iterative process during which power imbalances are addressed (Cattaneo & Goodman 2015). Throughout the empowerment process structures of unfreedom are explicitly and implicitly challenged and this process may lead to a greater sense of freedom for women (Dash & Srividya 2014). This study showed that while empowerment processes challenge structures of unfreedom, empowerment does not equal freedom for trafficked women. The catalyst for beginning the empowerment process is increased agency which is present even extremely restrictive environments (Jeffrey 2012).

A narrative methodology was applied, which consisted of five life story narratives with formerly trafficked women and semi structured interviews with practitioners working among trafficked women. The use of narrative methodology ensured deep rich data that would assist in achieving the overall aim of the study. This research revealed the experiences of trafficked women and offers new insights into their empowerment processes, exit strategies, and understanding of freedom by replying to two research questions.

Research Question 1: What are the key strategies that women have applied when exiting a trafficking situation?

Research Question 2: What empowerment processes do women experience when exiting a trafficking situation?

7.2 Key Strategies that Support Trafficked Women

This section is in direct response to research question one; What are the key strategies that women have applied when exiting a trafficking situation? Trafficked women applied a variety of strategies to support their exit from the sex trade. The strategies consisted of both practical tangible steps towards exit, as well as more conceptual strategies that contributed towards the development of thick agency and women's empowerment processes. Access to an alternative livelihood option is essential for women to successfully exit the sex trade. This study agrees with Wilson et al. (2015), that alternative livelihood options are critical for trafficked women's successful exit from the sex trade. Wilson et al. noted that women trafficked into the sex trade were interested in alternative employment and have the ability to develop employable skills. Financial security for trafficked women is important, women need to be able to continue financially supporting themselves and their families. Without an alternative livelihood option that understood the complex needs that trafficked women have, exit from the sex trade would have been impossible.

The presence of a support person and shared experiences also are significant factors within trafficked women's ability to exit the sex trade. As discussed in Chapter 5, a support person can provide encouragement and act as a safety net if a woman encounters difficulties while exiting. Being a part of a community of women that had all gone through similar experiences also gives encouragement to women as they exit the sex trade. When trafficked women encounter setbacks or pressure from external forces, the advice and support from women who have already journeyed towards exit becomes invaluable. Research conducted by Benoit and Miller (2001), had noted that having a support person can provide the extra motivation needed to exit and provide them with encouragement throughout their exit reducing the likelihood of women re-entering the sex trade. This study agrees with Benoit and Miller's argument.

Knowledge and support received through relationships with other women who have been trafficked also contribute towards the empowerment processes of women in this study. Other women can provide knowledge, and skills that women can enact as they seek to address power structures through their own empowerment. As women see other trafficked women successfully exit the sex trade it increases their self-belief that exit may also be possible for

them. As explained in Chapter 2, Cattaneo and Goodman's (2015) empowerment process model recognises that self-belief, knowledge and competence are central to empowerment processes for women.

This study also found that trafficked women do not need to actualise empowerment in order to successfully exit the trade, rather exiting the sex trade is one step along their empowerment journeys. As women exited the sex trade they displayed degrees of empowerment at a social, psychological and economic levels. Evidence of political empowerment was minimal throughout women's experiences both during and after their time in the sex trade. However, as Cambell and Mannell (2015) assert not having political empowerment does not usually impact on women's ability to become empowered in other dimensions. This would also appear to have been the case for the trafficked women of Sonagacchi. In my study psychological and social empowerment processes continue after women's exit from the sex trade as they began to heal from the trauma and social isolation which characterised their trafficking experience. Following exit from the sex trade women's self-confidence, optimism and general sense of well-being increases, characteristics which Li et.al (2015) have described as psychological empowerment.

This study found that trafficked women identified both practical and conceptual factors that helped to facilitate successful exit from the sex trade. Highlighted was the importance of economic opportunities for women to access. If target 16.2 (eradication of all forms of trafficking) of the Sustainable Development Goals is to be achieved, then creating economic opportunities for the 4.8 million (ILO 2017 p28) trafficked persons currently in the sex trade becomes an urgent need. Economic opportunities combined with support from women who have successfully exited their trafficking situation, and supportive community provides the ideal environment for trafficked women to successfully exit the sex trade. However, as discussed in Chapter 6 exit from the sex does not equate to trafficked women experiencing freedom.

7.3 Empowerment Processes of Trafficked Women

This section is in response to research question two; What empowerment processes do women experience when exiting a trafficking situation? This research confirmed Jeffrey's (2012) assertion that expressions of agency can exist even in extremely exploitative environments. Women who had been trafficked had some level of agency despite the exploitative environment they were in. Women were able to enact on this thin agency through

empowerment processes which culminated in a thicker agency. For example, petitioning a madam to allow a woman to earn income from the sex work she was conducting, could lead to aspects of economic empowerment. Economic empowerment allowed women to move within the structures of the red-light district, finding a new madam who gave them greater day to day freedom, or even becoming an independent sex worker. These processes resulted in a thicker agency for the trafficked women and a greater range of options from which she can choose.

As highlighted in Chapter 6 the thickening of agency was not a linear incremental process but ebbed and flowed as power structures impacted on the range of options that women could choose. The process of increasing agency was a catalyst for empowerment processes and facilitated women's ability to make decisions towards eventual exit from the sex trade. As the World Development Report (2012) has commented, women's agency is essential to development outcomes and that addressing the structures that act to thin trafficked women's agency will make a significant contribution to their situation. Structures are often linked to the social and cultural norms that are dominant within society. India is a patriarchal and collectivist society, and as Poveda and Roberts (2018) assert, these norms can influence on a trafficked women's preferences affecting her ability to enact agency. This study identified structures that thinned trafficked women's agency and hindered their successful exit from the sex trade. Some of the structures identified in this study were social stigma, family pressure and pressure from madams. This study confirmed that these structures affect a woman's agency, but also emphasised that women were able to overcome these structures by enacting empowerment processes.

Findings from this study confirmed that like agency, empowerment is an iterative rather than linear process. The empowerment of trafficked women is not a simple binary of being empowered or not empowered. Rather, it is a dynamic process. Women can move towards and away from empowerment many times during and after their trafficking experience. Cattaneo and Goodman's (2015) empowerment process model of goal setting, taking action, and reflecting on that action, as highlighted in Chapter's 2 and 6, was an effective way to understand trafficked women's empowerment process. Women began with small goals, and after being successful women would develop bigger goals until eventually formulating the goal to exit the sex trade.

Hence, conducting a comparative study exploring the empowerment processes and long-term outcomes of women who exited the sex trade through increased agency and choice versus those who were rescued from their trafficking experience would be a helpful piece of additional research. Understanding the empowerment process that trafficked women experience when rescued would provide valuable insight in how organisations and development practitioners can continue to create opportunities for empowerment once women have exited the sex trade.

The main implication of these findings, is that trafficked women can become empowered agents who are able to make choices towards exit despite the confines of the exploitative environment they find themselves in. Women are the orchestrators of their own empowerment and agency. Agencies that work alongside trafficked women can contribute through building self-efficacy, and assisting with goal setting, but ultimately trafficked women should be given the freedom to make choices for themselves. Trafficked women may journey towards empowerment and a thickening of their agency. However these processes in and of themselves do not equate to freedom which is what women were actually seeking to achieve.

7.4 Concluding Remarks

The overarching aim of this thesis was to explore trafficked women's experiences and understandings of freedom. In order to achieve this aim, the empowerment processes and thickening agency of trafficked women were explored, additionally strategies for successful exit from the sex trade were also identified. Empowerment processes and the thickening of agency were aspects of a woman's experience of freedom. However, in contradiction to Lau (2008), this study showed that being empowered and having thick agency did not equate to actual freedom, as defined and described by women in this study. Similarly, exit from the sex trade was an important step towards experiencing some degree of freedom, however it too did not equate to a full sense of personal freedom.

In Chapter two, Sen's exploration on freedom was reviewed noting that western ideals of freedom can not simply be transplanted across to other cultures and contexts (Sen 1999, Beyer 2014). Sen also asserted that lack of freedom was a result of a deprivation of capabilities and that the expansion of freedom constitutes the ends and means of development (Sen 1999, Graf & Schweiger 2014). This study has shown that in the Bengali context Sen's

equating freedom to restoration of capabilities is insufficient to describe how trafficked women experience freedom.

As discussed in Chapter's 5 and 6, trafficked women saw freedom as a distinct concept directly connected to their spiritual and emotional restoration. This study found that freedom is not simply a set of everyday practices and experiences as Deneulin (2005) asserts, rather it is an overall sense of well-being and contentment which is highly contextual, cultural and personal in nature. Women within this study articulated that there were a series of internal shifts that took place contributing to their overall sense of freedom. Further research could explore more deeply the internal shifts that take place among formerly trafficked women in West Bengal and other contexts in order for freedom to occur. Such research would contribute further to the understanding of freedom for trafficked women in different contexts.

The Bengali term to articulate freedom is *mukti* which has psychological and spiritual connotations, and aids in understanding how women can exit the sex trade but may not describe themselves as being free or having freedom. Recognising that exit from the sex trade and empowerment do not equate to freedom for trafficked women is a significant finding of this research. This finding is particularly significant in the development context as both Sen (1999) and the United Nations (2013) highlight that development occurs when individuals experience freedom. As development practitioners seek to end all forms of trafficking as set out in the Sustainable Development Goals (UN 2017), it will be important to recognise that for women to have a sense of freedom, interventions must continue beyond exit from the sex trade, facilitating the emotional and spiritual restoration that this study found was necessary for freedom to occur.

Each individual within each context will have a different understanding of what freedom is to them, and development organisations should work with individuals to help them achieve their own personal goals. Understanding the local context and culture before designing programs and interventions therefore becomes essential. Ideally interventions would be led by women from Sonagacchi, co-creating development programs to facilitate women achieving their goal of finding freedom. In this context these programs would have most likely involved aspects of empowerment, agency, and exit from the sex trade, however these concepts would not be the focus of interventions. The focus of the interventions would be freedom, and this study showed that trafficked women aspire to achieve this goal.

Before beginning this thesis, I was struck by the resilience and strength that I saw in women who had been trafficked into the sex trade. This was expressed in Kyle Scott's song that I used to begin this thesis. The lyric "now here I stand and watch you walk so tall" particularly reflects my own thoughts as I see women who are empowered agents who despite being subjected to exploitative situations have discovered a deep sense of self-worth and dignity. In the process of completing this thesis my admiration for these women has grown exponentially. It has been my privilege to be able to provide a platform in which some of these women were able to tell their stories. These women have encountered much pain and difficulty throughout their lives but have overcome their circumstances to exit the sex trade and find hope and in many cases freedom. All women who participated in this study have used their own experiences to encourage and help other women to successfully exit the sex trade. My hope is that through this research the narrative of trafficked women would change to one of strength and that more women will be able to exit their trafficking situation and experience a sense of personal freedom.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Massey University Ethics Approval



Date: 25 October 2016

Dear Phillipa Rea

Re: Ethics Notification - **SOB 16/32 - Exploring the exit strategies of trafficked women from Sonagacchi, Kolkata.**

Thank you for the above application that was considered by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: **Human Ethics Southern B Committee** at their meeting held on **Tuesday, 25 October.**

Approval is for three years. If this project has not been completed within three years from the date of this letter, reapproval must be requested.

If the nature, content, location, procedures or personnel of your approved application change, please advise the Secretary of the Committee.

Yours sincerely

Dr Brian Finch
Chair, Human Ethics Chairs' Committee and Director (Research Ethics)

Research Ethics Office, Research and Enterprise

Massey University, Private Bag 11 222, Palmerston North, 4442, New Zealand T 06 350 5573; 06 350 5575 F 06 355 7973 E humanethics@massey.ac.nz W <http://humanethics.massey.ac.nz>

Appendix 2: Information Sheet (English)

Exit Strategies for Trafficked Women from Sonagacchi, Kolkata Information Sheet for Practitioners

Namuskar,

My name is Phillipa Rea and I am currently enrolled as a Master's student in the Development Studies programme at Massey University, New Zealand. As part of my thesis I am conducting a study in Kolkata, India; where I have been living for the past six years. My Master's thesis focuses on the exit strategies of trafficked women. In my study I will be focusing on women in Sonagacchi, Kolkata and will be looking at the way women regain choice, as well as their ability to create a better life for themselves despite difficult circumstances. I am specifically interested in what factors were important for women to be able to leave the sex trade.

I would like to invite you to participate in this research. If you are happy to participate then I will be asking you to have one interview with me that will last approximately one hour. The interview will focus on your understanding of the strategies that trafficked women have applied to leave the sex trade and possible circumstances that might have helped women to do so. If you have any questions during the interview process, you are welcome to ask these at any time. If you agreed to have the interview voice recorded, you can also request to have the voice recorder turned off at any time. You can end the interview at any time, and you are also free to withdraw from the interview at any time. You can decide to withdraw completely from the research any time during the interview and up to 7 days following the review of the interview transcripts.

If you agree to take part in this study, I will make sure that all your information will be kept confidential and that your privacy is protected throughout the process. I will keep all information that you provide during the interview securely protected. You will have a chance to review the interview transcripts and to make changes during a time period of two weeks.

Thank you very much! If you have any questions, please contact me or my supervisors.

Phillipa Rea

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This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, Application 16/32. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Rochelle Stewart-Withers, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, telephone 06 356 9099 x 83657, email humanethicsouthb@massey.ac.nz

Appendix 3: Information Sheet (Bengali)

সোনাগাছি কলকাতা: পাচার হওয়া মহিলাদের প্রস্থান কৌশল

দরকারি তথ্য

আমার নাম Phillipa Rea এবং আমি বর্তমানে নিউজিল্যান্ড এর ম্যাসে বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়ের ডেভেলপমেন্ট স্টাডিজ প্রোগ্রামে একটি মাস্টার্স ছাত্র । আমার থিসিসের অংশ হিসেবে আমি কলকাতা, ভারতে একটি সমীক্ষা পরিচালনা করছি ; যেখানে আমি গত ছয় বছর ধরে বসবাস করছি . আমার মাস্টার্স থিসিস পাচার হওয়া মহিলা দেব প্রস্থান কৌশল এর উপর গুরুত্ব দিচ্ছে . আমার গবেষণায় আমি সোনাগাছি কলকাতার মহিলাদের উপর মনোযোগ নিবদ্ধ করছি এবং এটা জানার চেষ্টা করছি যে মহিলা রা কি ভাবে পছন্দসই পুনরুদ্ধার এর পথ খুজে পান বা তারা কি ভাবে সেই পথ কে বেছে নেন।. আমি এটাও অন্বেষণ করব যে তাদের কঠিন পরিস্থিতিতে সন্তোষ উন্নতিলাভ করা ক্ষমতা এবং স্থিতিস্থাপকতা কি একটি ফ্যাক্টর হতে পারে যার ফলে যৌন বাণিজ্য থেকে প্রস্থান সুগম হয়েছে বা হতে পেরেছে.

আমি এই গবেষণায় অংশগ্রহণের জন্য আপনাকে আমন্ত্রন জানাই চাই. আপনি যদি অংশগ্রহণে রাজী হন তাহলে আমার সাথে দুই সাক্ষাতকারকরার জন্য আপনাকে জিজ্ঞাসা করা হবে. প্রতিটি 1 ঘন্টা স্থায়ী হবে ।প্রথম ইন্টারভিউ তে আপনার জীবনের গল্প এর উপর ফোকাস করা হবে, এবং দ্বিতীয় সাক্ষাত্কার সেক্স বাণিজ্য থেকে আপনার প্রস্থান উপর ফোকাস করা হবে. সাক্ষাত্কার দুটি আলাপচারীতার মাধ্যমে হবে এবং আপনার স্বাচ্ছন্দ্য মত আপনার গল্প শেয়ার করতে পারেন যেটা করা আপনার পক্ষে আরামদায়ক বা সম্ভব হবে . আপনার জীবনের সেই গল্প গুল, যে গুল বলতে আপনার ভাল লাগবে, আপনী সুধু সেইগুলই বলতে পারেন। আপনার যদি ইন্টারভিউ প্রক্রিয়ার সময় কোনো প্রশ্ন থাকে, তাহলে সেই প্রশ্ন গুল করার জন্য আপনাকে স্বাগত জানাই. আপনি ভয়েস রেকর্ডার তা যে কোনো সময় বন্ধ করার অনুরোধ করতে পারেন. আপনি যে কোনো সময়ে সাক্ষাত্কার শেষ করতে পারেন, এবং আপনি যে কোনো সময়ে সাক্ষাত্কার থেকে প্রত্যাহার করতে পারবেন.

আমি ইন্টারভিউ প্রক্রিয়া চলাকালে আপনার গোপনীয়তা নিশ্চিত করছি . আপনি যে কোন ছদ্ম নাম নির্বাচন করতে পারবেন যে নাআম কে আমি আমার থিসিস লিখতে ব্যবহার করব ।আমি আপনার সব ব্যক্তিগত তথ্য সাক্ষাত্কারে প্রদান রাখা হবে.সেগুলকে নিরাপদে সংরক্ষিত রাখব।

আপনাকে অনেক ধন্যবাদ! যদি আপনার কোন প্রশ্ন থাকে, তাহলে আমার বা আমার সুপারভাইজার সাথে যোগাযোগ করুন.

Phillipa Rea

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[Redacted]
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এই প্রকল্পটি পর্যালোচনা করা হয়েছে এবং ম্যাসে বিশ্ববিদ্যালয় হিউম্যান নীতিশাস্ত্র কমিটি অনুমোদন: দক্ষিণ বি, অ্যাপ্লিকেশন __/__. যদি আপনি এই গবেষণার আচার সম্পর্কে কোনো উদ্বেগ আছে, ড Rochelle, স্টুয়ার্ট-অশ্বেথ, চেয়ার, ম্যাসে বিশ্ববিদ্যালয় হিউম্যান নীতিশাস্ত্র কমিটির সাথে যোগাযোগ করুন : দক্ষিণ বি, টেলিফোন 06 356 9099 x 83657, ই-মেইল humanethicssouthb@massey.ac.nz

Appendix 4: Consent Form

Exit Strategies for Trafficked Women from Sonagacchi, Kolkata Participant Consent Form

I have read the information sheet, or had the information sheet read to me, and had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered and I am happy with the answers I received. I understand that I may ask more questions at any time during the research.

I agree / disagree to the interview being sound recorded

Please tick the appropriate box to indicate your preference to receiving information regarding the findings of the research

I wish to receive a summary of the findings of the research ☐

I wish to receive access to a digital copy of the full thesis ☐

I wish to have a meeting to hear about the findings of the research ☐

I do not wish to receive information regarding the findings of the research ☐

My contact details are _____

I agree to participate in the study based on the conditions explained in the information sheet.

Signature _____

Full Name Printed _____

Date _____

Appendix 5: Summaries of the Life Story Narratives

Runu

Runu was born in Bangladesh, she is the youngest of six children, having four brothers and one older sister. She was raised primarily by her older sister as her mother often was away in search of work. Runu had a good relationship with her parents and admitted as a young child she was often spoilt by her mother and father.

At age 12, Runu met a boy within her village that she had romantic feelings for. She wanted to marry him, however her older brother did not agree to the marriage. Shortly after this at age 13 Runu was married to a man that was arranged by her parents and older brother. Upon marriage Runu went to live with her husband's family. Here she gave birth to two daughters. Throughout her marriage Runu experienced physical and emotional abuse from her husband and her mother-in-law. Eventually at age 16 Runu's mother-in-law forced her to leave the family home and return to her father's house. Runu tried to take her two children aged 2 and 10 months with her but was not allowed to.

On returning to her father's house, many of the villagers made comments about Runu's failed marriage and the burden that she had now become to her father and brothers. At age 17, a relative approached Runu offering to take her to India to work as a housemaid. Runu accepted the offer to reduce the burden on her family and earn an income of her own. The relative sold Runu into the red-light area of Sonagachhi, the purchase price now became Runu's debt.

Within Runu's first month in Sonagachhi she was sold on to a different brothel, in this brothel Runu developed friendships with other women who had been trafficked from Bangladesh. When Runu first arrived in Sonagachhi she had no idea that she had arrived in a red-light area and was now destined to become a sex worker. For the first five of six days Runu was placed in the courtyard of the brothel to observe what was happening, it was in this way that she learnt she was about to become a sex worker. On the sixth day her first customer was sent to her room.

Runu worked as a sex worker for 3 years before she received any income from the sex trade. For those 3 years Runu was not allowed to leave the brothel unless it was with a customer, and then someone was sent with her to ensure that she returned. Runu also had no choice about what customers she had sex with and when. She recalls many times when she was forced to have sex with customers even when very unwell.

One of the women living in the same brothel as Runu left the sex trade to work for a business that employed sex workers. This woman suggested that Runu also leave the trade and work for the same company. Runu joined the company, but was unable to leave the sex trade due to pressure from her madam to be with customers. Runu worked for the company for approximately 12 months before illness saw her leave and return temporarily to her family in Bangladesh.

When Runu returned to Sonagacchi she again entered the sex trade full time to pay off debt that she incurred through her illness. After another 12 months in the sex trade Runu met a Freeset community worker who offered her another opportunity to exit the sex trade and enter an alternative livelihood option. This time her exit was successful, she started training to sew bags with five other women. Runu reported that at first it was really hard, during training the wages were low as it was a relatively new company then. Runu recalls how the 6 women advocated to management for a higher wage and then supported each other to leave the sex trade. While working at Freeset Runu was diagnosed as HIV+ve, she is now receiving treatment and is healthy. Runu has now been out of the sex trade for 9 years, she shares her story with her neighbours and friends in the hope that they too exit the sex trade.

Priya

Priya grew up in a Indian village, she is the second youngest of 8 siblings, having 4 older sisters, two older brothers and one younger brother. Priya had a very happy childhood where she would roam around the village and play with her friends. She had a very close bond with her mother and often dreamed of getting a good job so that she could buy a house and take care of her mum.

When Priya was around 8 years old, her father passed away from cancer. His death had a huge impact on Priya's mum and she struggled to cope. At the time of Priya's father's death her older brother's did not return to the family home to help, Priya's older sister's had already been married and were living with their husband's family. This left Priya, her younger brother and her mum to cope on their own. All of the family land had been sold to pay for the weddings of Priya's older sisters, as a result Priya would eat a small simple meal once every other day.

Two years after Priya's father died, she was sold by a relative to a family, after about 10 -15 days Priya ran away back to her mother's house begging her to allow her to stay. Her mother then arranged for her to be married to an older man. Priya met her husband on her wedding

day, she was 10 years old. Shortly after her wedding, Priya ran away as she was scared, after hiding out for a few days, Priya again returned to her mother's house.

At age 11, Priya's sister arranged for Priya to be married to another man. During this marriage Priya was abused physically, mentally, and sexually. Priya reports that she discovered that her husband was having an affair with her sister in law, and shortly after this her husband attempted suicide by ingesting poison. Priya decided that she would leave her husband and return to her mum, he had threatened to poison her in the past and his suicide attempt made her feel very scared. When Priya's sister came to know that Priya had left her husband she tried to force Priya to return by beating her, Priya refused. At this point Priya was 13 years old.

Priya stayed with her mother for another 2 years, and was then sent to a city to work as a house maid. There were three girls working at the house and all were raped by the man of the house. After a year of working as a house maid Priya convinced her mother to allow her to return home. Priya remained with her mum for another year, and then when she was 17 her sister took her to Kolkata, where she was sold into the sex trade. For the first 3 years Priya was not allowed to leave the brothel, and received no money, she was given alcohol before customers came to make her more compliant. After 3 years of being in the sex trade, Priya got news that her mum was sick, she wanted to return home, but her madam did not allow her to leave. Priya was told by her madam that she would need to work for an additional year to clear the debt of her purchase price.

Other women in the brothel told Priya that she needed to fight with her madam, so with the help of a local gang Priya went to the police. The police came and spoke with Priya's madam, but nothing changed. After an additional year Priya left with 4000RPS and returned to her mother. Priya explained everything to her mother, her mother told Priya that it would be best for her to return to the sex trade, and accept her fate. Priya returned to Sonagacchi and became an independent sex worker. She went all over India to service customers. After a while Priya found a partner who supported her, so that she no longer had to work in the sex trade. After a year her partner returned to his village, for the first 18 months he sent her money, and then he stopped and Priya was forced to return to the sex trade to support herself.

After another year, Priya met a Freeset community worker. Priya asked if the community might be able to offer her work so she could leave the sex trade. Priya was offered work, and joined Freeset, she started her training with 7 other women. The other trainees would

encourage Priya and help her if she was struggling. Priya has now been out of the sex trade for 18mths, she has a goal to save up and get a house outside of Sonagacchi so that she can be truly free.

Joya

Joya is the youngest of 12 children, she was born in a rural village in West Bengal. By the time Joya was born 6 of her siblings had already died from malnutrition, and her mother passed away not long after she was born. Joya was raised by her older sister who worked in Kolkata, cleaning peoples clothes. Joya would travel with her sister house to house, they were too poor to afford milk for Joya, so she survived on jaggery mixed with water.

When Joya was 7 years old, her sister suddenly died of cancer. Joya returned to her village and lived with her grandmother. They survived by begging and foraging for food. At age 11, Joya left her grandmother to get work. She worked for as a house maid, in this house Joya was sexually abused. After a short time Joya returned to her grandmother unable to cope with the sexual abuse.

When Joya returned to the village she was approached by her Uncle who told her that his daughter worked in a good place, and Joya could go and work in the same place. Joya agreed to go to Kolkata with her uncle in the hope that she could support her grandmother. Joya's Uncle sold her into the sex trade, she was around 12 years old.

Joya's madam was her cousin (her Uncle's daughter), Joya recalls when she had sex with her first customer. She was terrified, and the sex was very rough and violent, Joya bled so much that a doctor was called. Joya suffered severe abuse from her madam, she would be beaten on a regular basis without warning or provocation. Joya received no money for the first 5 years of being in the sex trade.

Other sex workers in the same brothel encouraged Joya to ask her madam to start paying her money. Joya threatened to leave and go to another brothel, but her madam told her that she had to pay 10,000RPS before she could leave. Joya didn't have any money, but a person from the community lent her the money interest free, and she left to work in another brothel under a new madam in an Adiya system.

Joya's new madam allowed her more freedom's and paid her half of what she earnt from customer's. Joya would occasionally return to her village. Joya's grandmother had died about a year after she was sold into the sex trade, so she had no family. On one of Joya's visits to

her village she talked to a woman who worked at Freeset. The women knew Joya's story and recognised her from Sonagacchi, she suggested that Joya might want to leave the sex trade and work with her at Freeset. At that time, Joya had never heard of Freeset, she didn't know if it would be good or bad, so she ignored the woman.

Joya developed a relationship with a man, he offered to marry her, but she did not trust him, so she refused. Joya and her partner got into a big fight, as a result her partner left and Joya attempted suicide. The woman from Joya's village visited her and suggested that she go back to the village, the woman offered to support Joya. Joya refused, wanting to support herself, at that time the woman again offered to help her get work at Freeset. Joya accepted the offer and began working at Freeset.

The woman from Joya's village helped Joya by feeding her lunch during her training time. Joya reflects that this was the catalyst that allowed her to exit the sex trade. Joya began training with many other girls and they always encouraged each other. After Joya completed training she married her partner and exited the sex trade. Joya has been out of the sex trade for 7 years. She now supports her own family as well as a young girl from her village, who thanks to Joya is studying in Class 10. Joya feels that since she has found freedom (heart, body, mind and soul) that she has a responsibility to help others who want to exit the sex trade, the way that she was helped.

Sukuntula

Sukuntula grew up in a rural village in West Bengal, she has 9 brothers and sisters, 5 older sisters, two older brothers, and two younger brothers. Sukuntula had a very close relationship with her mother and father and enjoyed a care free childhood.

By age 11 Sukuntula's older sisters had all gotten married and things became difficult financially for her family. Sukuntula suggested to her father that she goes out to work cleaning people's houses so that she could help the family. Sukuntula's father thought she was too young to go out to work, but Sukuntula was persistent and got a job helping a local family.

Sukuntula continued working with the local family until she turned 13, at this time her family decided that she was now old enough to get married. Sukuntula's father found a man for her to marry but the family demanded a large dowry, so at the last minute the wedding

was cancelled. After about 2 – 3 months Sukuntula was married to another man. Sukuntula moved from her family's house to her husband's family home.

Sukuntula received emotional abuse from her mother in law and after she had been married for about a month, her mother in law set her up to be raped by 4 local village men.

Fortunately, Sukuntula was able to escape the situation without getting raped. From that time, Sukuntula's mother in law abused and tortured Sukuntula. She was eventually poisoned by her mother-in-law and so returned home to her parents' house. At that time Sukuntula was 14 years old.

Not long after Sukuntula returned to her parent's house she was raped by a man from her village. Sukuntula was encouraged by her mother to keep this secret so that she did not bring shame to the family. During this time, Sukuntula's father had been speaking to people in the village about what he could do for his daughter. One couple told him that they could get work for Sukuntula in the village. Sukuntula went with this couple to Kolkata and was sold by them into the sex trade.

Sukuntula went straight into a adhiya system so was able to earn money from the beginning. Her madam never explained to her what had happened to her, she discovered that when the first customer was sent to her room. Sukuntula spoke to other women in the sex trade who were from her village, they convinced her to stay, telling her that her father would not accept her back now, and this way she could help her family.

During her time in the sex trade Sukuntula developed a relationship with a customer, he offered to help her exit the sex trade by taking her to his village. She accepted his offer, and moved to his village. Sukuntula's partner used to drink a lot, and send her out to different towns to have sex with customers. After 2 years living with her partner Sukuntula decided to leave and return to Kolkata where she had more control over her sex work.

Sukuntula found her re-entry into Sonagacchi, and her failed exit attempt difficult to deal with, and she turned to alcohol to cope. Sukuntula developed another relationship with a customer, this customer also offered to help Sukuntula leave the trade by coming to live with him. Sukuntula at first refused as she was fearful from her previous experience. Eventually she agreed to go and live with her partner but refused to leave the sex trade. She wanted to keep her financial independence, and her partner did not have regular work. Sukuntula became a flying sex worker, living outside the red-light area, but coming in each day to work in the sex trade.

Sukuntula always wanted to leave the sex trade, she searched for other forms of work, but was never successful in finding work. When Sukuntula was around 30 years old she joined the local Women's committee, here she would make soap and sanitary pads, selling them to women in the sex trade. She would also run HIV awareness programs, and do condom distributions. This period of time was financially very difficult for Sukuntula as she received no income for the work she did with the women's committee.

Sukuntula developed a strong bond with the founder of the committee (Priya) who would often feed Sukuntula lunch. Sukuntula often shared with Priya about her desire to exit the sex trade and Priya would encourage her to have hope for an opportunity. After a few years, Sukuntula through Priya met a couple who talked of their desire to start a business that provided alternative employment for women who wanted to exit the sex trade. At first Sukuntula did not trust the couple, as they were foreigners, but eventually after several meetings Sukuntula agreed to be a founding staff member of Freeset.

Sukuntula started Freeset with 19 other women, Sukuntula felt like the factory belonged to her and the other women, and this motivated her to learn how to sew and do her best. When she completed training she chose to leave the sex trade for good. Sukuntula felt like she had a lot of support and everyone wanted her to succeed in her desire to exit the sex trade. Sukuntula has now been out of the sex trade for 17 years, and finds great joy in helping other women who are in the sex trade find their way out.

Mini

Mini grew up in a small rural village in what is now known as Bangladesh. She has five sisters and one brother. Mini had a happy childhood playing with her friends, and spending time on the river with her father catching fish. Mini didn't go to school despite her parents' wishes, instead she left home each morning to play with friends and then returned home in the afternoon when school was finished.

Mini was from a Hindu majority village that was on the Muslim majority side of the border following the partition of India. At around 11 years old Mini and her family fled their village following riots and crossed the border to a refugee camp. Conditions in the refugee camp were difficult with Mini's family of nine forced to sleep in one small tent, and only two toilets for the whole camp to use.

During Mini's time at the refugee camp she befriended an older woman who consistently offered her work in Kolkata. One night after about a year in the refugee camp, Mini had an argument with one of her sisters. Mini was so upset, that she went straight to her friend and said that she would like to go to work in Kolkata. The woman took Mini to Kolkata, but instead of giving her the job she was promised she was sold into the sex trade. Mini was 12 years old.

On arrival in Sonagacchi, Mini had no idea that she had been sold into the sex trade. She spent the first week locked in a room not allowed to speak with anyone. After a week had gone by, a Sari was sent to her room, however Mini was too young to know how to wear a Sari. Shortly afterwards she was offered a glass of coke from her madam, the coke was drugged and Mini was no longer able to walk, or talk, she also was unable to see clearly. Once the drugs had taken effect Mini was sent her first customer, she recalls trying to escape but because of the effect of the drugs being unable to. The next morning Mini told her madam that she wanted to go back home, but the madam would not allow it.

When Mini had been in the sex trade for 15 days, a well-known local pimp broke down the door to Mini's room, he told Mini that the following day he would take her away from the brothel. The following day two men arrived at the brothel and forcefully removed Mini. She recalls lots of fighting and violence, before she was eventually taken to another room in a neighbouring red light area. Mini recalls that time in her life as very difficult, she did not know who had taken her from the brothel or what they wanted. She would cry all day, and all night. Most nights the landlord's son would come drunk into Mini's room and attempt to rape her.

Over time Mini got to know the man that arranged for her rescue from the brothel. They began a relationship and eventually got married and moved into a local room together. Mini recalls how they helped each other become good people. She recalls how they would spend most of their time drunk and using drugs. It was an offer for Mini to look after the children of her landlord at age 17, that helped her and her husband become sober. Mini sees that her husband was instrumental in encouraging Mini to help others, as a result Mini began to work for local community organisations that supported women in the sex trade, until in 2001 she became a founding staff member of Freeset.

Mini's husband passed away after a severe stroke, this has been very hard for Mini to cope with as she attributes him to her Freedom from the sex trade. Mini reflects that since her

husband has gone she has no joy or happiness in her life, just pain and hardship. Mini has no children, and as a result feels alone and isolated. Mini relates that her one happiness is when she can help women and girls like her find Freedom from the sex trade. Her biggest hope is to see Freeset expand so that many women can leave the sex trade, and young girls in villages do not end up being trafficked as she once was.

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